

Nonresidential fatherhood in Canada

Lisa Strohschein¹

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to shed light on nonresidential fatherhood in Canada. Data come from the 2012 LISA. Analysis was restricted to fathers who had children under the age of 19 (N=3,592); approximately 17.4 per cent were nonresidential fathers. Logistic regression models indicated that outside a marital union, low educational attainment and low income were associated with increased odds of being a nonresidential father. Teen parenthood was not a statistically significant predictor. I discuss the implications of these findings as well as the need for measures that better capture variability in the living arrangements of fathers and their children.

Keywords: family complexity; Canada; nonresidential fatherhood; living arrangements; children.

Résumé

Le but de cette étude est d'éclairer le phénomène de paternité non résidentielle au Canada. Les données proviennent du sondage LISA 2012. L'analyse est limitée aux pères ayant des enfants de moins de 19 ans (N=3 592). Environ 17,4% sont des pères non-résidentiels. Les modèles de régression logistique indiquent qu'étant hors d'une union maritale, d'avoir un faible niveau de scolarité, et de faible revenu est associé à une probabilité élevée d'être un père non-résidentiel. Être un parent adolescent n'est pas un prédicteur statistiquement significatif. Je discute des implications de ces résultats ainsi que de la nécessité de mesures qui permettent de mieux saisir la variabilité des modes de vie des pères et de leurs enfants.

Mots-clés : complexité familiale; Canada; paternité non résidentielle; des modes de vie; les enfants.

Introduction

Families, in Canada and elsewhere, are more diverse and fluid today than they were a generation or two ago. The normativity of heterosexual marriage has given way to a plethora of alternative arrangements, including cohabitation, same-sex relationships (married or cohabiting), and even living-apart-together partnerships. In addition, people have acquired a merry-go-round approach to intimacy (Cherlin 2009). Specifically, loosening the social constraints on union formation and dissolution has empowered individuals to step in and out of intimate relationships with relative ease. Together, these patterns have increased the likelihood that adults and children will inhabit a wide variety of family forms throughout their lifetime.

Keeping pace with these transformations in family life and evaluating the consequences of these trends are now central issues in family research. Recently, demographers have adopted the term *family complexity* to organize their understanding of the ways in which families are changing. Family complexity refers to the different ways in which marriage and legal ties, living arrangements, fertility, and parenting are no longer coterminous factors in the makeup of families (Carlson and Meyer 2014). Because there are numerous possibilities for unlinking these factors from one another, family complexity is perhaps best understood by contrasting it with the *traditional family* form. In a traditional family, co-residence coincides with marriage, the union is lifelong, and all children are born and raised within the marital union. Although family complexity cannot be considered an entirely new

1. Associate Professor, Associate Chair Undergraduate Program, 6-13 HM Tory Building, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta; email: lisa.strohschein@ualberta.ca

phenomenon, this concept has become useful for illustrating the scope of change in contemporary families and providing a framework for theorizing about its consequences.

Given that there are few studies on family complexity in the Canadian context, there is a critical need to document these patterns in this country. This is an enormous task that lies beyond the scope of a single project. For this reason, the current study considers *nonresidential fatherhood* as one aspect of family complexity. Nonresidential fatherhood exemplifies family complexity to the extent that parenthood can be de-coupled from living arrangements, with children occupying a different residence from their fathers.

Importantly, nonresidential fathers experience all of the challenges associated with belonging to a complex family. Complex families are of concern because resources, roles, and responsibilities are diffused across multiple households (Berger and Bzostek 2014; Fomby et al. 2016; Furstenberg 2014). Money, time, and attention are finite resources that parents expend on their children. Nonresidential fathers must allocate what they have across multiple households, and their children necessarily compete for a smaller share of available parental resources (Carlson and Berger 2013; Tach et al. 2014). Moreover, families function best when roles and responsibilities are clear and unambiguous. Parental roles and responsibilities can become murky when either or both adults have a marital history that encompasses a succession of previous partners with whom they have produced children (Brown and Manning 2009). In such instances, there may be confusion and even profound disagreement about who is family and who is obligated to perform tasks or provide help (Cherlin and Seltzer 2014; Nock 2000). For example, co-residential stepfathers and nonresidential biological fathers may hold divergent views about disciplining children, or they might both defer such tasks to the co-residential biological mother. When the boundaries of acceptable behaviour shift depending on the parental figure, children are left to try make sense of the variable responses their behaviour elicits.

As such, researchers and policymakers have considerable interest in understanding nonresidential fatherhood from the perspective of family complexity. Simply stated, identifying where and with whom children live is critical for understanding how children are being parented on a daily basis, the type of support they receive from their parents, and how these relate to their development and well-being (Waller and Jones 2014). In the next section, I evaluate how nonresidential fatherhood is measured and review what is currently known about nonresidential fatherhood in Canada and elsewhere.

Nonresidential fatherhood

Scholarly interest in fatherhood has grown exponentially over the past few decades (Greene and Biddlecom 2000; Lamb 2010). Its emergence as a field of research can be traced to an ongoing gender revolution that has been unfolding over the last half-century. This period witnessed the end of specialization, where men were the breadwinners and women took care of domestic chores and raised children. Instead, the roles of men and women have gradually become more similar (though not fully so), with both sexes balancing the demands of paid employment and home life (Altintas and Sullivan 2016). Growing levels of paternal involvement in childrearing prompted social scientists to pioneer new avenues of research that evaluate how fathers matter with respect to child well-being and family functioning.

The trend toward increased paternal involvement, however, is not universal. In particular, researchers have discovered diverging experiences of fatherhood, with an upswing in both paternal involvement and paternal absence (Juby and LeBourdais 1998; Livingston and Parker 2011). The growing presence of women in the labour market in the past half-century paved the way for men's increased involvement in family life, including spending more time with their children (Goldscheider et al. 2015). At the same time, sharp climbs in rates of *union dissolution* and *non-marital childbearing* have weakened the links between fathers and their children, by increasing the chances that fathers and children will live apart from one another. When they do not share the same residence, fathers may struggle to remain involved in the lives of their children (Carlson and McLanahan 2004). Their difficulties are amplified if nonresidential fathers enter into new unions with competing obligations (Manning et al. 2003; McGee and King 2012; Tach et al. 2010).

It is fair to say that research on nonresidential fatherhood is at a preliminary stage in most countries. Because of this, researchers have yet to achieve consensus on how nonresidential fatherhood should be measured. There is unevenness, for example, in what constitutes a *dependent child*, with researchers employing different criteria and imposing different age limits. In the U.K., where the rate of nonresidential fatherhood is estimated to be 16.7 per cent (Poole et al. 2016), dependent children are restricted to those under the age of 16. In Australia, the age of dependent children is limited to those under the age of 18, but the prevalence of nonresidential fatherhood is also far lower, at approximately 8.4 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Why they are far lower in Australia than in other jurisdictions has yet to be determined. One difference, however, is that Australian researchers exclude adopted children from their calculations, whereas other countries do not. Conversely, the United States, with the highest reported prevalence of nonresidential fatherhood at 26.9 per cent (Jones and Mosher 2013; Livingston and Parker 2011), includes both biological and adopted children, but defines dependent children as under the age of 19. Clearly, inconsistencies in the measurement of nonresidential fatherhood pose challenges for researchers, who seek rigorous comparisons across different countries.

Another measurement problem in this emerging field of research stems from the crude categorization of nonresidential fatherhood. Despite wide variability in living arrangements among contemporary families, researchers continue to employ binary categories. It is clear that such dichotomization has not been guided by thoughtful debate about the threshold at which a father's time spent living apart from their child meets the criteria for identification as a nonresidential father. Also, discussion is absent as to whether two categories sufficiently capture the contemporary experience of nonresidential fatherhood.

Instead, researchers seem to have taken their cue from the divorce literature. Rising divorce rates in the 1980s spurred initial interest in nonresidential fatherhood, as separation agreements almost always awarded sole custody of children to the mother. In that context, nonresidential fatherhood made sense as a binary category. Today, this approach is much less compelling. Not only has there been a dramatic shift toward shared living arrangements, with an increasing number of divorced fathers living with their children at least some of the time, but divorce is no longer the only entry point into nonresidential fatherhood. Because so many of the assumptions underlying nonresidential fatherhood no longer apply straightforwardly, a critical reassessment of its measurement is both timely and warranted.

In American studies to date, fathers must live apart from one or more of their children on a full-time basis in order to be considered nonresidential (Jones and Mosher 2013; Livingston and Parker 2011). Fathers who share a residence with one or more children on a part-time basis, even if it is just once a month, are identified as residential fathers. In the U.K., Poole and colleagues (2016) constructed their variable from a single question that asked fathers whether they had a child under the age of 16 living elsewhere. Not only do such approaches oversimplify the living arrangements of fathers and their children, they may fail to capture meaningful distinctions.

Canadian researchers have also relied on a binary distinction but have differentiated between fathers who lived on a full-time basis with all of their children versus fathers who had any other kind of living arrangement with their children (Beaupré et al. 2010). Analyzing data from the 2006 General Social Survey, Beaupré and colleagues reported that 19.4 per cent of fathers had one or more biological or adopted children under the age of 19 whose living arrangements deviated from full-time residence in their father's household, i.e., were living elsewhere either on a full- or part-time basis. By imposing a different threshold, Beaupré and her colleagues made visible a subset of fathers who would otherwise have been treated as residential fathers. Why is this important? The simple answer is that it may be a mistake to treat fathers who live part of the time with at least one of their children as if they are in the same category as fathers who live with all of their children on a full-time basis.

This becomes apparent if one recognizes that fathers who live on a part-time basis with one or more children share many of the same challenges as nonresidential fathers. For instance, a father who lives with his child only some of the time must distribute his time, attention, and finances across multiple households in ways that a father who has all of his children living with him on a full-time basis does not. Moreover, fathers whose children live with them only some of the time are just as likely as nonresidential fathers to experience the contradictions and ambiguities in roles and responsibilities that characterize complex families.

In the current study, I imposed a threshold that treats fathers who live less than half the time with one or more children in the same way as fathers who do not share a residence at all with one or more children. Formally stated, *nonresidential fatherhood* was defined as a father who lives less than half of the time, or not at all, with one or more biological or adopted children under the age of 19. This threshold is more conservative than the one used by Beaupré and her colleagues, as their cutoff distinguished between fathers who lived with all of their children on a full-time basis from fathers who had any other kind of living arrangement. Unfortunately, it was not possible, given the constraints of the survey data used in this study, to experiment with a range of different thresholds or to create multiple categories. While this approach has its own limitations, including greater difficulty comparing these findings with prior work, the use of a unique threshold in this study is intended to raise awareness of alternative ways of assessing nonresidential fatherhood, and to stimulate future discussion about improving its measurement.

In addition to estimating the prevalence of nonresidential fatherhood in Canada, this study highlights the shortcomings of an *address-based approach* to family. *Complex families*, by their very nature, transcend the confines of a single residence. Because of this, family complexity can be made to disappear when researchers focus on the relationships of household members *within* the household, but neglect to ask about relationships *beyond* the household. One way in which complex families become invisible is through routine measures that identify intact households. An *intact household* is one in which a couple are the biological or adopted parents of all children in the household. Unless additional questions are asked about family members living elsewhere, researchers cannot accurately identify all instances of family complexity. By demonstrating that a sizeable percentage of intact households actually contains nonresidential fathers, this study provides further support for the argument that family demographers must move beyond an address-based approach to family.

A final goal was to establish whether the known correlates of nonresidential fatherhood in other studies could also be observed in the Canadian population. Complex families are often drawn from disadvantaged segments of the population (McLanahan 2009; Tach 2015). This appears to be true for nonresidential fathers as well. The research suggests that nonresidential fathers have, on average, less education and report lower income than fathers who reside with their children (Carlson et al. 2017; Dermott 2016; Jones and Mosher 2013; Livingston and Parker 2011). Nonresidential fathers also tend to be younger on average and less likely to be living with a partner than residential fathers (Kiernan 2006; Poole et al. 2016). Others have found that men who became fathers in their teenage years were less likely to share a residence with their offspring than men who became fathers at a later age (Mollborn and Lovegrove 2011). In the current study, these associations were tested at the bivariate level, but also entered in a logistic regression model to evaluate the relative contribution of these variables, adjusted for one another.

Methods

Sample

Data come from the 2012 Canadian Longitudinal and International Survey of Adults (LISA), the first wave of a longitudinal survey conducted by Statistics Canada (Statcan 2014). The sample was derived through a stratified multi-stage, multi-phase design. The target population was all Canadians living in the ten provinces, excluding residents of institutions, members of the Canadian Armed Forces living in military camps, and people living on Indian reserves. These exclusions represent approximately 2 per cent of the Canadian population. Interviews were conducted with all household residents aged 15 and older; children aged 0 to 14 will be interviewed in subsequent waves once they reach the age of 15. The overall response rate was 71.8 per cent. When weighted, the sample is representative of the adult Canadian population over the age of 15.

The original sample consisted of 32,133 respondents residing in 11,458 households. To address the research questions of this study, the sample was reduced to males who were between the ages of 18 and 65 and who identified themselves as parents of children under the age of 19. This produced a final sample of 3,592 fathers.

Measures

Nonresidential fatherhood was derived by taking into account fathers' responses to a series of questions regarding how many children they have and the ages of their oldest and youngest child, and comparing this information to the household roster, which contained the number, ages, and nature of the relationship for each household member to every other household member. Decisions about the inclusion of children who were not full-time residents of the household were made by the interviewer. Children who lived less than half of the time in the household were treated as nonresidential, whereas children who lived more than half of the time in the household were treated as residential. Children who spent exactly half of their time in the household were included only if they were present on the day of interview. Problematically, the response to the question about the proportion of time a child lived in the household was not included as a variable in the final dataset, and thus could only be inferred from their presence on the household roster. This variable will be made available beginning in the third wave of LISA (Andrew Heisz, personal communication 2015). Nonresidential fatherhood was coded '1' if fathers had any biological or adopted children aged 18 and younger living less than half of the time, or not at all, in the father's household, and coded '0' if fathers had all of their biological and adopted children aged 18 and younger living with him at least half of the time. There is obvious fuzziness as to the placement of fathers whose children lived exactly half the time with them, a limitation that I return to in a later section.

Independent variables included known correlates of nonresidential fatherhood. Current age was coded into a four-level categorical variable. Dummy variables were constructed for fathers aged 35 to 44, 45 to 54, and 55 to 65, with 18 to 34 acting as the omitted reference category. Marital status was a categorical variable that differentiated between fathers who were married; cohabiting; formerly married (separated, divorced, or widowed); or single and never married at the time of the survey. Dummy variables were created for each marital status, with married as the omitted reference category in the regression model. Father education is a dichotomous variable that compares fathers who have attained a postsecondary degree or diploma (coded '1') with fathers who have not completed a postsecondary degree or diploma (coded '0'). Preliminary analysis with additional categories for paternal education suggested that a simple distinction between fathers who had and had not completed a postsecondary degree provided the best fit. The father's 2011 total income before taxes, reported in dollars, comes from the linked tax records. Overall, 94.8 per cent of all respondents participating in the 2012 LISA were successfully matched to their tax records. Data were missing for a small percentage of respondents who denied permission to link to their tax records as well as instances where permission was granted, but a match could not be made (Hemeon 2016). In the regression model, father's income was recoded into units of ten thousand dollars. 'Teen parent' was a dummy variable that assessed whether the respondent fathered their first child as a teenager (coded '1' if first birth was before age 20, and '0' otherwise). 'Intact household' evaluated whether all children in the household were the biological or adopted parents of the respondent and his partner or spouse (coded '1' if intact household and '0' otherwise). Dummy variables for 'region of residence' distinguished between fathers living in eastern provinces, Québec, Ontario, the prairie provinces and British Columbia. In regression models, Ontario was the omitted reference category.

Analysis

The dependent variable was dichotomous, therefore logistic regression was used to determine correlates of nonresidential fatherhood. In a logistic regression model, regression coefficients are interpreted as the log of the odds of an event before and after a one-unit change in an explanatory variable, with all other terms held constant. Normalized sampling weights were applied to all analyses to adjust for nonresponse and differential selection probabilities in a complex survey design.

Results

Nonresidential fathers accounted for 17.4 per cent of all Canadian fathers with dependent children under the age of 19. Table 1 compares characteristics of residential fathers and nonresidential fathers. Nonresidential fathers were slightly overrepresented among younger men and under-represented among older respondents.

Table 1. Sample characteristics of residential and nonresidential fathers in Canada, 2012 LISA (N=3,592)

| | Residential father | Nonresidential father |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Age | | |
| 18–34 | 22.1 | 24.0 |
| 35–44 | 40.6 | 34.9 |
| 45–54 | 31.3 | 37.3 |
| 55–65 | 6.0 | 3.7 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 15.37^{**}$ |
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 78.0 | 30.3 |
| Common law | 18.1 | 21.2 |
| Separated, divorced or widowed | 2.0 | 32.0 |
| Single, never married | 1.9 | 16.5 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 1,065.14^{***}$ |
| Completed postsecondary education | 33.7 | 17.3 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 64.49^{***}$ |
| Income | 64,671.81 (47,235.00) | 52,371.46 (44,323.65) |
| | | F = 35.59 ^{***} |
| Teen parent | 29.8 | 37.3 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 13.61^{***}$ |
| Intact household | 85.8 | 13.7 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 1,364.60^{***}$ |
| Region | | |
| Eastern provinces | 6.1 | 7.4 |
| Québec | 24.6 | 26.5 |
| Ontario | 40.2 | 35.6 |
| Prairie provinces | 16.5 | 20.4 |
| British Columbia | 12.6 | 10.1 |
| | | $\chi^2 = 12.16^*$ |
| N (%) | 2,968 (82.6%) | 624 (17.4%) |

Note: Statistics are reported as means (SD) and proportions.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Residential fathers were far more likely to be married than were nonresidential fathers (78.0 versus 30.3 per cent). Conversely, residential fathers were less likely to be ‘formerly married’ or ‘single, never married’ compared to nonresidential fathers. Differences between married and formerly married fathers were particularly pronounced. Nearly all married fathers were residential (92.4 per cent); in contrast, the majority of formerly married fathers (77.2 per cent) were nonresidential.

Nonresidential fathers were also more socioeconomically disadvantaged than residential fathers, with fewer having obtained a postsecondary degree or diploma, and reporting a lower pre-tax income relative to residential fathers. Becoming a parent as a teenager was slightly more common for nonresidential fathers than it was for residential fathers (37.3 versus 29.8 per cent). The majority of residential fathers resided in intact households, where both adults were the biological or adopted parents of all children living in the household. Nonetheless, almost one in seven (13.7 per cent) nonresidential fathers also met the criteria for living in an intact household. Regional differences in the proportion of nonresidential fathers were marginally significant, with nonresidential fathers disproportionately represented in the prairie provinces.

Table 2 presents the results of a logistic regression model estimating the correlates of nonresidential fatherhood in Canada, adjusted for one another. The odds of being a nonresidential father were lower for those aged 55 to 65 relative to those aged 18 to 34, adjusting for other terms in the model. The odds of being a nonresidential father were significantly lower for those who had achieved a postsecondary degree or diploma relative to those with less education. Higher pre-tax income in 2011 was associated with a lowered risk of being a nonresidential father. Relative to married fathers, the odds of being a nonresidential father were significantly higher for

Table 2. Logistic regression model, correlates of nonresidential fatherhood, 2012 LISA (N=3,592)

| | b | (s.e.) | Odds ratio |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|
| Age (ref=18–34) | | | |
| 35–44 | 0.08 | (0.14) | 1.08 |
| 45–54 | 0.24 | (0.15) | 1.27 |
| 55–65 | –0.71 | (0.30) | 0.49* |
| Marital status (ref=married) | | | |
| Common law | 1.22 | (0.14) | 3.39*** |
| Separated, divorced or widowed | 3.77 | (0.17) | 43.38*** |
| Single, never married | 3.14 | (0.20) | 23.10*** |
| Completed postsecondary education | –0.29 | (0.13) | 0.75* |
| Income | –0.03 | (0.01) | 0.97* |
| Teen parent | –0.09 | (0.12) | 0.91 |
| Region (ref=Ontario) | | | |
| Eastern provinces | 0.29 | (0.22) | 1.34 |
| Québec | –0.26 | (0.14) | 0.77 |
| Prairie provinces | 0.51 | (0.15) | 1.67*** |
| British Columbia | –0.16 | (0.19) | 0.85 |

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

those who were cohabiting, formerly married (separated, divorced, or widowed), or single and never married. Once adjusted for other terms in the model, being a teen parent was not statistically significant correlates of nonresidential fatherhood. Relative to fathers residing in Ontario, the odds of being a nonresidential father are significantly higher among fathers living in the prairie provinces.

Discussion

In the past, complex family forms accounted for a fraction of the population. Over the course of the past few decades, however, family complexity has become much more ordinary. Because families bear primary responsibility for the care and socialization of children, researchers have wondered whether family complexity poses a risk to child well-being, interferes with the transmission of cultural, economic and social resources to the next generation, or has unanticipated implications for society as whole. The purpose of the current study was to analyze data from the first wave of the LISA household panel survey, in order to shed light on nonresidential fatherhood as one dimension of family complexity in Canada.

In the current study, the criteria for nonresidential fatherhood were met when a father had any biological or adopted children under the age of 19 who lived less than half of the time, or not at all, in his household. As discussed earlier, this threshold was determined by the constraints of the data, and thus is a weakness of this study. At the same time, this threshold presented an opportunity to think about nonresidential fatherhood in a different way. I first compare current findings with prior research as a way of highlighting existing problems in measurement, before discussing how researchers might better conceptualize nonresidential fatherhood in future research.

Results indicated that 17.4 per cent of Canadian fathers met the criteria for nonresidential fatherhood. This estimate places Canada in the middle of pack—far below the 26.9 per cent reported in the U.S. but well above the rate of 8.4 per cent reported in Australia. Nonetheless, because the measurement of nonresidential fatherhood varies across countries, comparisons must be made cautiously.

One shared feature of this study with previous American and Canadian research is that *dependent children* were consistently defined as being under the age of 19. Elsewhere, researchers have selected a smaller age range for identifying dependent children, capped at those under age 16 (United Kingdom) or under age 18 (Australia). Whether these age variations have an effect on observed estimates has not been investigated to date, but there is at least one reason to be concerned about selecting older children. Namely, choosing a higher age limit could

potentially inflate rates of nonresidential fatherhood by inappropriately including fathers of older children who have left home to attend a postsecondary institution. None of the studies that comprise children under the age of 19, including the current study, have attempted, or even have the necessary information, to exclude from their estimates fathers whose children have moved away to attend a postsecondary institution in another location. As such, researchers should be aware of the implications of including older children. Ultimately, social scientists must pursue methods that result in more accurate estimates of nonresidential fatherhood.

As noted earlier, U.S. and Canadian studies have imposed a different threshold when evaluating the proportion of time that fathers share a residence with their children. The U.S. employed the most stringent definition, by treating fathers who live on a part-time basis with one or more children as residential fathers. Even so, the prevalence of nonresidential fatherhood was far higher in the United States than in Canada (26.9 versus 17.4 per cent). This large gap suggests that nonresidential fatherhood is a more dominant force in the lives of American families than it is in Canadian families. This also raises questions about the extent to which estimates would need to be upwardly revised should American researchers begin to count fathers who share their residence with one or more children on a part-time basis as nonresidential fathers.

Estimates in the current study were somewhat comparable to prior Canadian research, with slight variation in the threshold at which fathers were considered nonresidential. Beaupré and her colleagues (2010) distinguished between fathers who lived on a full-time basis with all their children and those fathers who had a separate residence from one or more children on a full- or part-time basis. Thus, when fathers lived with one or more children less than half the time, the current study and the study by Beaupré and colleagues similarly treated these fathers as nonresidential. Once co-residence exceeded the 50 per cent threshold, the current study treated these fathers as co-residential, whereas Beaupré and her colleagues did not. Not surprisingly then, the estimates reported by Beaupré and her colleagues are slightly higher than what was obtained in the current study (19.4 versus 17.4 per cent).

Despite differences from prior work in how nonresidential fatherhood was measured, the findings of current study offer some important insights. First, this study reveals how an address-based approach can be blind to instances of family complexity. In most large-scale surveys, scholars have too narrowly focused on family relationships within a selected household. In doing so, they overlook questions that make it possible to identify family members who reside elsewhere. When such information is available, hidden complexity comes into view. Such was the case in the current study, where approximately one in seven (13.7 per cent) nonresidential fathers met the criteria for living in an intact household. In other words, the father and his partner were the biological or adopted parents of all children in the household, but he was also father to at least one child under the age of 19 living elsewhere on a part- or full-time basis. As such, the findings of the current study reinforce the notion that relying solely on an address-based approach can undermine the conclusions that researchers make about families.

This hidden form of family complexity also raises questions about how such fathers are treated by the institutions they come into contact with, and whether their unique needs are being recognized. Income taxes, eligibility for social programs, and the level of claimable benefits are often determined by the configuration of the household. The absence of clear guidelines for complex families, including how to count children who divide their time across multiple households, perpetuates existing tensions and competing interests in policies and programs (Carlson and Meyer 2014). Policymakers are under increasing pressure to ensure their programs have their intended effect and do not unfairly treat those who belong to a complex family. Formulating appropriate responses in the policy arena depends on making complex families visible, lending urgency to the task of systematically investigating how families are changing in the Canadian population.

Second, in assessing the social and demographic correlates of nonresidential fatherhood in Canada, the results of this study correspond with what researchers have discovered elsewhere. In particular, the current study found that nonresidential fathers had attained lower levels of education, reported less income, and were more likely to be outside a marital union than were co-residential fathers. Similar associations have been reported in the U.S. (Carlson et al. 2017; Jones and Mosher 2013; Livingston and Parker 2011) and in the U.K. (Dermott 2016; Kiernan 2006; Poole et al. 2016). This is the first study, however, to detect these associations in the Canadian population. That these disadvantages were more common among nonresidential fathers in Canada, even

though the definition of nonresidential fatherhood was different from what has been used elsewhere, gives credence to the argument that nonresidential fathers and their families constitute a vulnerable segment of the population. These findings also suggest variation in nonresidential fatherhood across Canada. The prairie provinces accounted for disproportionately more nonresidential fathers across the country than elsewhere. Given that the 2012 LISA survey took place during a boom in the oil industry, with many fathers commuting from distant provinces to work in the oilfields of Alberta and Saskatchewan, this finding was not entirely unexpected. Whether this association holds in the more recent environment of low oil prices is an open question, but can and should be investigated in subsequent waves of the LISA survey.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the need to refine existing measures of nonresidential fatherhood. At issue is achieving consensus on how to categorize household members who simultaneously occupy multiple residences. Up until now, researchers studying nonresidential fatherhood have largely avoided taking up this issue. Nonetheless, the pitfalls of assigning children to a single household are becoming apparent. For example, one study in France found that half of the children categorized as living with their fathers were, in fact, dividing their time between the households of their estranged parents (Toulemon and Pennec 2010). As this article has made clear, some researchers would have classified these fathers as nonresidential fathers, whereas others would have categorized them as residential fathers. Resolving these discrepancies in measurement must command greater attention in future research.

Viewing this issue from the perspective of family complexity, I have posited that fathers who live on a part-time basis with one or more dependent children should not be treated in the same way as fathers who live with all of their children on a full-time basis. To the extent that part-time fathers must allocate resources across multiple households and navigate ambiguity in their roles and responsibilities, their experiences may more closely resemble those of a complex family. Whether this classification is appropriate could not be determined in the present study, but bears careful investigation and verification in empirical research in the future. Importantly, researchers should not be bound to dichotomous measures of nonresidential fatherhood, but strive instead for measures that meaningfully capture the wide variability that exists in the actual living arrangements of fathers and their children.

Of course, this task is not possible without high quality data. As such, the current study joins with a growing chorus of researchers advocating for a new generation of surveys that are sensitive to the myriad ways in which families exhibit complexity (Manning 2015; Tach 2015; Waller and Jones 2014). This means that survey researchers must be willing to move beyond address-based approaches and plumb more deeply into what it means to hold membership in multiple households simultaneously. There can be no doubt that the need to address this data gap is likely to become more pressing as the twenty-first century unfolds.

Limitations and future directions

One limitation of population-based surveys that rely on men providing information about their children is that the prevalence of nonresidential fatherhood may be undercounted. First, not all men are willing to acknowledge (and some may even be unaware of) all the children they have fathered. Second, by design, population-based surveys exclude men living in institutions, thereby overlooking one way that fathers come to live apart from their children. Research in the United States, for example, suggests that more than half of incarcerated men are the parents of minor children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). To better estimate its true prevalence, researchers should consider other methods for assessing nonresidential fatherhood in the population. This might involve taking the child as the unit of analysis and probing resident adults for further information when the biological father is absent. Alternatively, researchers might obtain the perspectives of different household members, which are known to vary widely in terms of identifying who is seen as family (Carlson and Meyer 2014; Waller and Jones 2014).

The most serious shortcoming of the current study is that data constraints precluded knowing the proportion of time fathers shared the same residence as their children. Instead, the proportion of time spent in the same household had to be inferred from a child's presence on the household roster. Misclassifying nonresidential fathers was most likely to occur in instances when fathers shared a residence with one or more children

precisely half of the time, because assignment to the category of nonresidential father was made on the basis of whether the child was present on the day of interview. While this information will become available from the third wave of the LISA survey onward, its absence on the current dataset made it impossible to test different thresholds or move beyond binary categories in deriving a measure of nonresidential fatherhood.

One potential future advantage of the LISA is that it is a longitudinal household panel survey. All household members in the first wave maintain their status as longitudinal respondents, and will be re-interviewed on a biennial basis, regardless of where they live. Consequently, this research design will help social scientists to obtain a more dynamic picture of family living arrangements. In particular, researchers will have the opportunity to better understand pathways in and out of nonresidential fatherhood. Identifying the routes that lead fathers to live apart from their children is important, because they could potentially signal different ways in which fathers interact with or allocate resources to their children. Fathers who live apart from their children following divorce are likely to have very different experiences than are fathers who have never shared a residence with their biological children, as occurs when fathers have only maintained a romantic relationship with the mother of his children (Tach and Edin 2011), and be different yet again from fathers who do not reside with their children because they are incarcerated. Similarly, longitudinal research can also shine light on the fluidity of contemporary families, by revealing whether children who are living apart from their fathers at one point in time ever come to share a residence with their fathers at a later date. Finally, longitudinal research may also address the thorny problem of selection. If men with few resources and low personal skills are more likely to experience nonresidential fatherhood, and men who are more advantaged and have high personal skills are less likely to experience nonresidential fatherhood, researchers cannot easily disentangle the consequences of family complexity with its antecedents (Furstenberg 2014).

Conclusion

Family complexity is slowly becoming a fixture of Canadian society, yet few studies have documented its scope, let alone assessed its consequences. Family complexity challenges basic assumptions about the roles, obligations, and resource-sharing functions of the family unit. As the living arrangements of fathers and their children become ever more diverse, researchers must strive to capture these variations in their measures. Importantly, existing discrepancies in the measurement of nonresidential fatherhood must be resolved; otherwise, researchers will be hampered in their ability to conduct comparative analyses or to advance knowledge. The current study offers modest suggestions for moving this field of research forward, but makes clear that further work, both in Canada and elsewhere, will be needed to better understand nonresidential fatherhood and how it is reshaping family life in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgments

Funding for this research comes from a SSHRC Insight grant (435-2014-0268). The research and analysis are based on data from Statistics Canada, but the opinions expressed do not represent the views of Statistics Canada. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2015 PAA meetings in San Diego and the 2015 FCD Conference in Ottawa.

References

- Altintas, E., and O. Sullivan. 2016. Fifty years of change updated: Cross-national gender convergence in housework. *Demographic Research* 35:455–70.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Australian Social Trends, 2006*. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/5a3e269e290eb5b1ca2571b0001032d8!OpenDocument> (retrieved October 2016)
- Beaupré, P., H. Dryburgh, and M. Wendt. 2010. Making fathers ‘count’. *Canadian Social Trends* 90:26–34.

- Berger, L.M., and S.H. Bzostek. 2014. Young adults' roles as partners and parents in the context of family complexity. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654:87–109.
- Brown, S., and W.D. Manning. 2009. Family boundary ambiguity and the measurement of family structure: The significance of cohabitation. *Demography* 46:85–101.
- Carlson, M.J., and L.M. Berger. 2013. What kids get from parents: Packages of parental involvement across complex family forms. *Children and Youth Services Review* 87(2):213–49.
- Carlson, M.J., and S.S. McLanahan. 2004. Early father involvement in fragile families, in *Conceptualizing and Measuring Father Involvement*, edited by R. Day and M. Lamb. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 241–71.
- Carlson, M.J., and D.R. Meyer. 2014. Family complexity: Setting the context. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654:6–11.
- Carlson, M.J., A.G. VanOrman, and K.J. Turner. 2017. Fathers' investment of time and money across residential contexts. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79(Feb):10–23. (DOI:10.1111/jomf.12324)
- Cherlin, A.J. 2009. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the American Family Today*. New York: Knopf.
- Cherlin, A.J., and J.A. Seltzer. 2014. Family complexity, the family safety net, and public policy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654:12–30.
- Dermott, E. 2016. Non-resident fathers in the UK: Living standards and social support. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 24(2):113–25.
- Fomby, P., J.A. Goode, and S. Mollborn. 2016. Family complexity, siblings, and children's aggressive behavior at school entry. *Demography* 53(1):1–26.
- Furstenberg, F.F., Jr. 2014. Fifty years of family change: From consensus to complexity. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654:87–109.
- Glaze, L.E., and L.M. Maruschak. 2008. *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=823>
- Goldscheider, F., E. Bernhardt, and T. Lappegård. 2015. The gender revolution: A framework for understanding changing family and demographic behavior. *Population and Development Review* 41(2):207–39.
- Greene, M.E., and A.E. Biddlecom. 2000. Absent and problematic men: Demographic accounts of male reproductive roles. *Population and Development Review* 26(1):81–115.
- Hemeon, J. 2016. Historical data linkage quality: The longitudinal and international study of adults, and tax records on labour and income. Cat. 89-648-X. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Jones, J., and W.D. Mosher. 2013. Fathers' involvement with their children: United States, 2006–2010. *National Health Statistics Reports* 71:1–21.
- Juby, H., and C. LeBourdais. 1998. The changing context of fatherhood in Canada: A life course analysis. *Population Studies*, 52(2):163–75.
- Kiernan, K. 2006. Non-residential fatherhood and child involvement: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study. *Journal of Social Policy* 35(4):651–69.
- Lamb, M.E. 2010. *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. New York: Wiley.
- Livingston, G., and K. Parker. 2011. *A Tale of Two Fathers: More Are Active, but More Are Absent*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Manning, W.D. 2015. Family formation processes: Assessing the need for a new nationally representative household panel survey in the United States. *Journal of Economic and Social Measurement* 40:171–93.
- Manning, W.D., S.D. Stewart, and P.J. Smock. 2003. The complexity of fathers' parenting responsibilities and involvement with nonresident children. *Journal of Family Issues* 24(5):645–67.

- McGene, J., and V. King. 2012. Implications of new marriages and children for coparenting in nonresident father families. *Journal of Family Issues* 33(12):1619–41.
- McLanahan, S. 2009. Fragile families and the reproduction of poverty. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621:111–31.
- Mollborn, S., and P.J. Lovegrove. 2011. How teenage fathers matter for children: Evidence From the ECLS-B. *Journal of Family Issues* 32(1):3–30.
- Nock, S.L. 2000. The divorce of marriage and parenthood. *Journal of Marriage Therapy* 22:245–63.
- Poole, E., S. Speight, M. O'Brien, S. Connolly, and M. Aldrich. 2016. Who are non-resident fathers? A British sociodemographic profile. *Journal of Social Policy* 45(2):223–50.
- Statcan. 2014. *Longitudinal and International Study of Adults, 2012: User Guide*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Tach, L. 2015. Social mobility in an era of family instability and complexity. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 657:83–96. (DOI: 10.1177/0002716214547854)
- Tach, L., and K. Edin. 2011. The relationship contexts of young disadvantaged men. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 635:76–94. (DOI: 10.1177/0002716210393680)
- Tach, L., K. Edin, H. Harvey, and B. Bryan. 2014. The family-go-round: Family complexity and father involvement from a father's perspective. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654:169–84.
- Tach, L., R. Mincy, and K. Edin. 2010. Parenting as a 'package deal': Relationships, fertility, and nonresident father involvement among unmarried parents. *Demography* 47:181–204.
- Toulemon, L., and S. Pennec. 2010. Multi-residence in France and Australia: Why count them? What is at stake? Double counting and actual family situations. *Demographic Research* 23(1):1–40.
- Waller, M.R., and M.R. Jones. 2014. Who is the residential parent? Understanding discrepancies in unmarried parents' reports. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76:73–93.