

Parenting and contact before and after separation

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Background

- 3 shifts in our society
 - Family composition
 - Fathering
 - Parenting post separation

Policy interest

Policymakers concerned about high rates of divorce and separation and their impacts:

- Low father-child contact levels
- Negative effects on child outcomes
- Diminished capacity to parent

Research questions

1. How is a father's involvement as a parent before a separation linked to contact patterns after a separation?
2. *How is a mother's parenting capacity affected by separation?*

Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

Following 19,000 children since 2000.

- Surveyed at 9 months, 3, 5, 7, 11 years
- Questions on parenting activities and attitudes
- Age appropriate questions
- Self completion questionnaire

Note:

- Does not follow father after separation

Parenting and post separation contact

How does a father's parenting involvement when together drive what happens later?



Key facts about the sample

We looked at MCS children:

- Parents were together at 9 months
- Mother was the main respondent
- Parents separated after 9 months and by age 11
- Total: 2,758 children

Note: Families with twins or where father died have been excluded from the sample

Sample for the different waves

- 14.329 - Total number of families at 9 months
- 795 - Separations between 9m and 3
- 767 - Separations between 3 and 5
- 476 - Separations between 5 and 7
- 720 - Separations between 7 and 11
- **2,758 - Total number of separated families**

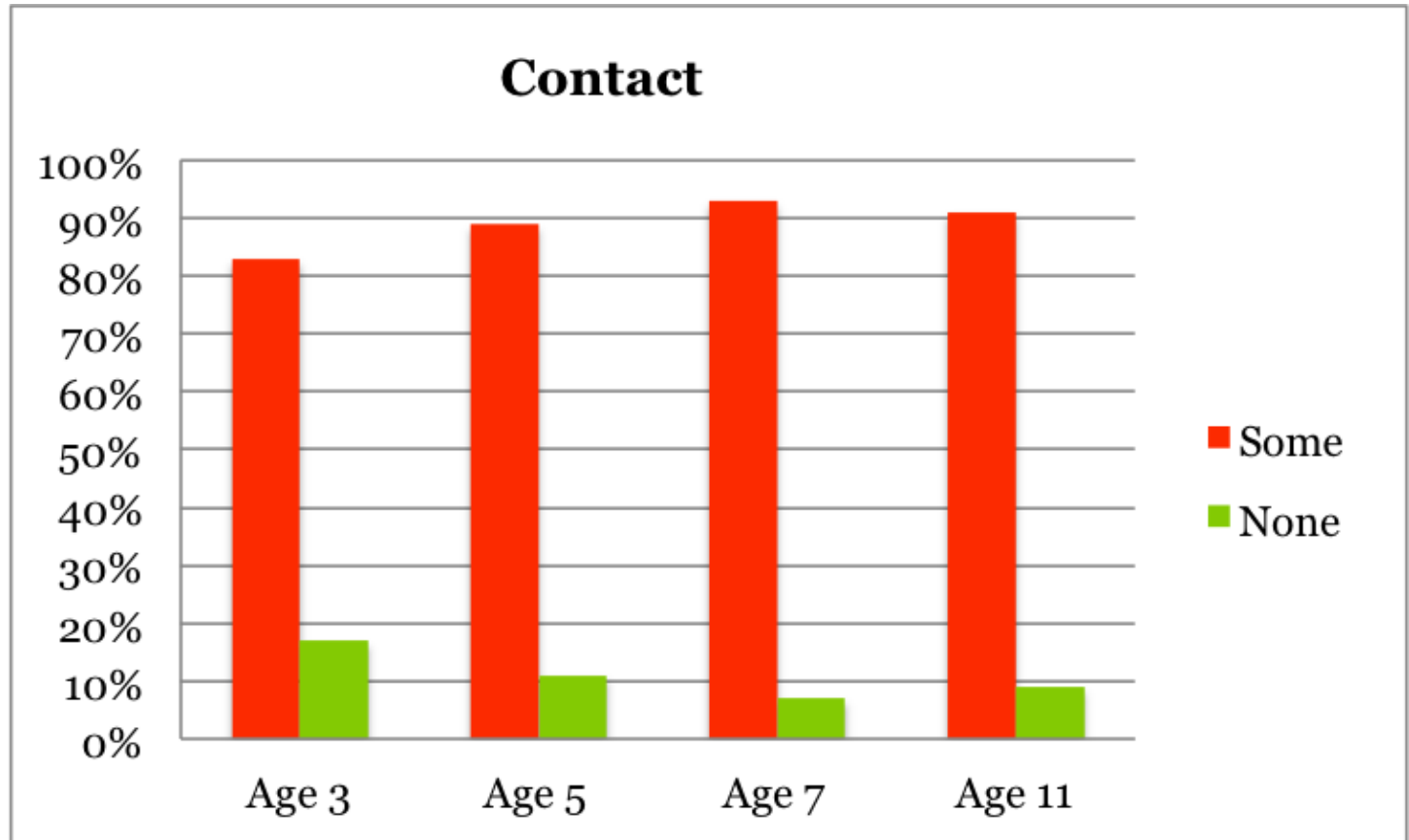
Contact questions

Parents were asked about 3 aspects of contact:

1. Any contact
2. Frequency
3. Overnight stays



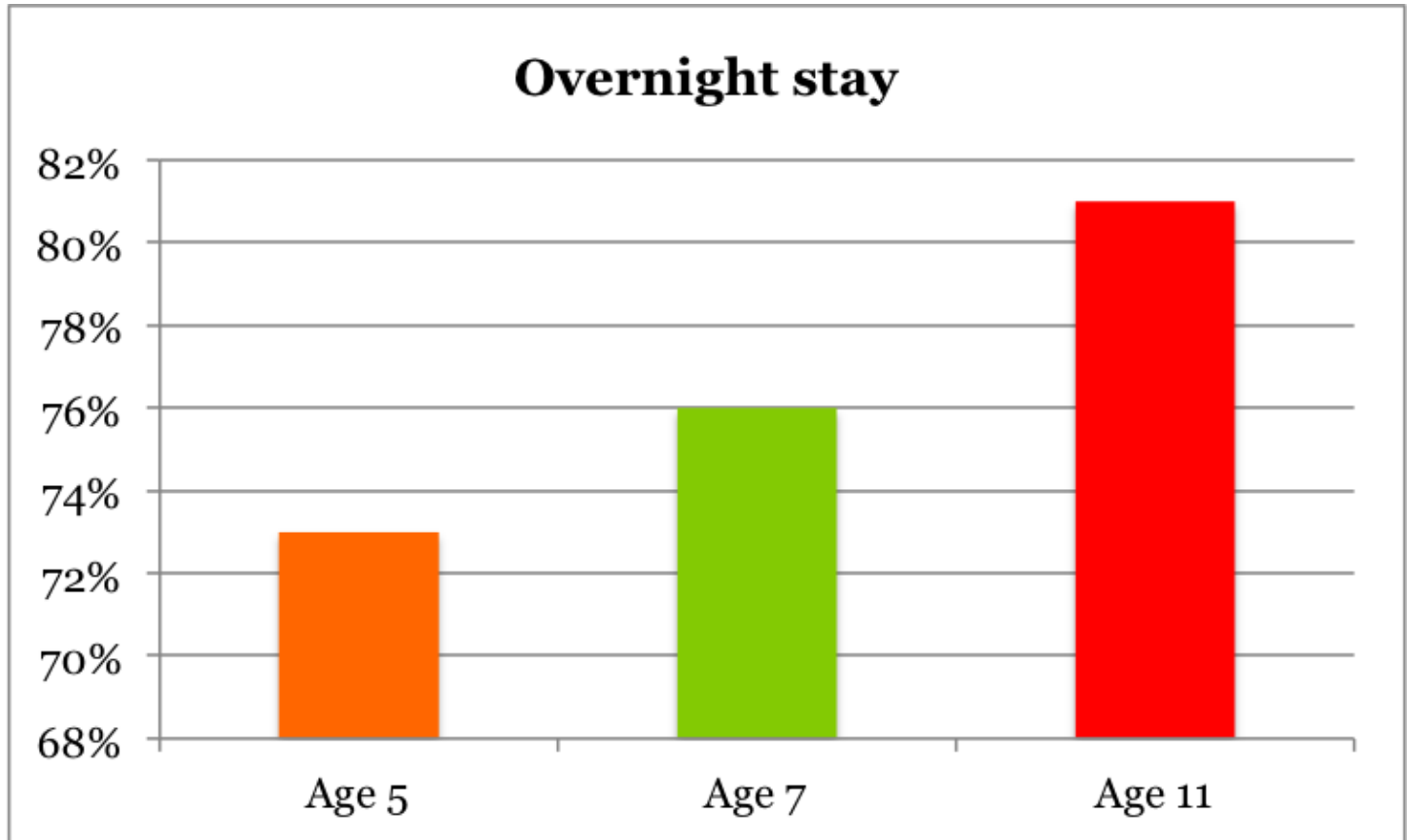
Newly separated dads and contact



How often?

Column %	Sep. Age 3	Sep. Age 5	Sep. Age 7	Sep. Age 11
Daily or almost daily	10	10	13	11
3-4 times per week	15	17	19	20
1-2 times per week	35	36	37	38
Less often	22	25	22	22
Never	18	12	9	9
Total	100 (787)	100 (745)	100 (456)	100 (715)

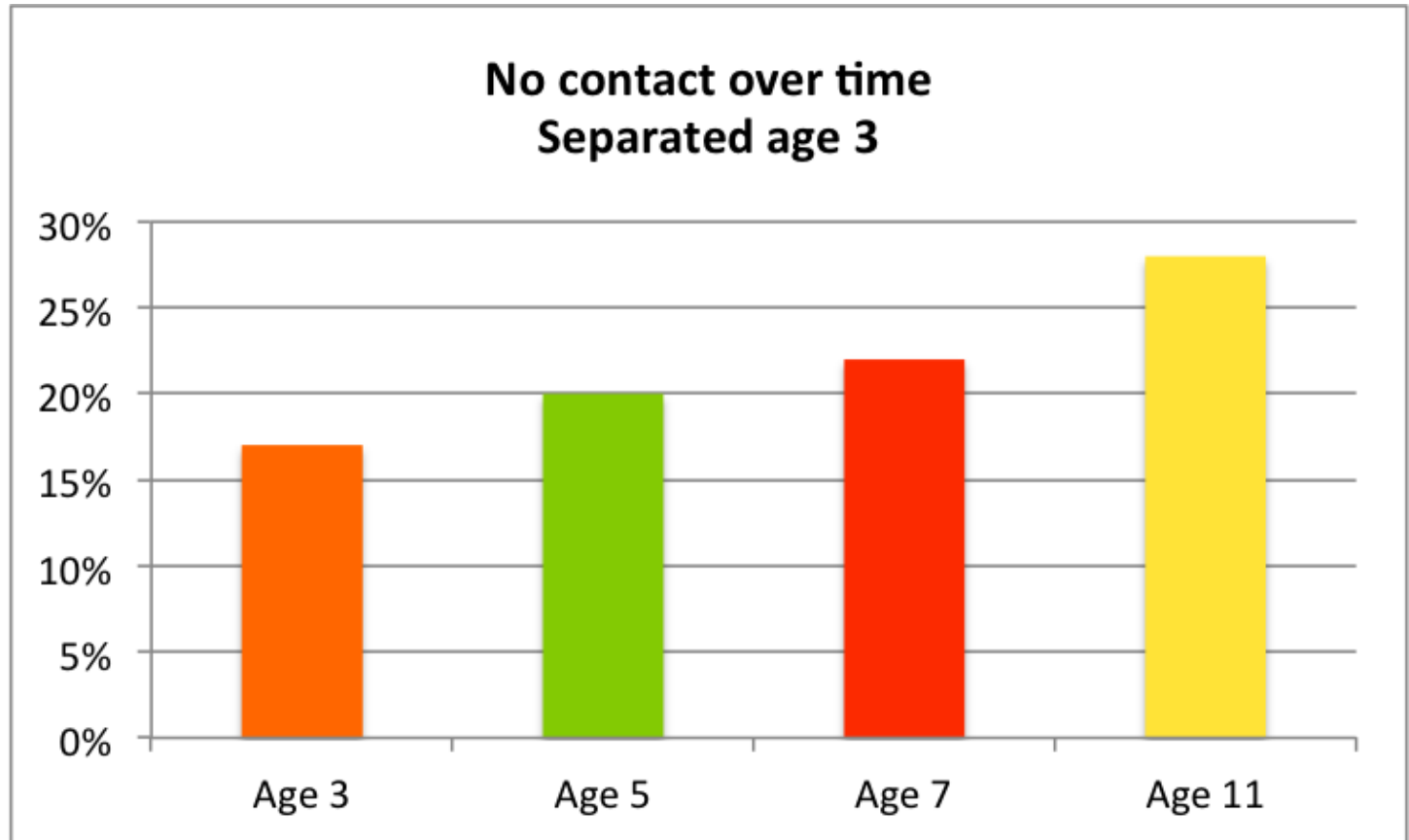
Overnight stays



How often is child staying overnight?

Column %	Separated Age 5	Separated Age 7	Separated Age 11
Often	44	49	48
Sometimes	22	20	25
Rarely	7	7	8
Never	27	24	19
Total	100 (642)	100 (415)	100 (635)

Time since separation



How involved is the father?

Parents are asked age-appropriate questions:

- Nappy changing
- Feeding
- Getting up in the night
- Reading, singing, playing
- Going to the park



How involved is the father cont.

Dads are asked about their relationship with their child:

- How often do you look after your child on your own?
- How close are you to your child?
- How good a parent do you think you are?

Other family factors

- Father's education
 - Father's and mother's employment status prior to separation
 - Father's and mother's health status
 - Family income
 - Older and younger siblings
 - Age and sex of child
- Plus
- Time since separation

Hypotheses

1. Involvement
 - More involved father = more contact
2. Time since separation
 - More time = less contact
3. Child characteristics
 - Child older = more contact
 - Child is a girl = less contact
4. Socio-economic status
 - lower contact = less contact

Analysis

- Multivariate analysis
 - OLS and Logistic regression models
- Disentangling age of child and length of separation

Results for any contact

Results from logistic regression for any contact	Hypothesis supported?
1 Father has more involvement in childcare / activities	No
2 Father spends time alone with child more often	No
3 Father feels close to child	No
4 Father feels confident as a parent	No
5 Less time since separation	Yes
6 Older child	Yes
7 Child is a boy	Yes
8 Higher parental and family socio-economic resources	Yes

Results for contact frequency

Results from OLS regression for any contact	Hypothesis supported?
1 Father has more involvement in childcare / activities	Yes
2 Father spends time alone with child more often	Yes
3 Father feels close to child	Yes
4 Father feels confident as a parent	No
5 Less time since separation	Yes
6 Older child	Yes
7 Child is a boy	Yes
8 Higher parental and family socio-economic resources	Partly

Results for overnight stays

Results from OLS regression for any contact	Hypothesis supported?
1 Father has more involvement in childcare / activities	Yes
2 Father spends time alone with child more often	Yes
3 Father feels close to child	Yes
4 Father feels confident as a parent	No
5 Less time since separation	Yes
6 Older child	No
7 Child is a boy	Yes
8 Higher parental and family socio-economic resources	Yes

Actions and attitudes

- Clear difference between any contact and the frequency and nature of contact
- Any contact not shaped by paternal involvement or perception
- More involved dads have more frequent contact and more overnight stays
- Dads who feel closer to their children have more frequent contact and more overnight stays
- How competent a dad believes himself to be makes no difference

What else matters?

Increases chance of contact

- Having educational qualifications
- Having a job
- Having brothers and sisters

Doesn't increase chance of contact

- Marital status
- Younger siblings
- Father's age/health

Policy and practice

There are some important messages:

- We need to pay attention to family life before a split
- Fathers need to be closely involved over first decade of child's life
- What a dad does with his child matters most
- Collaborative care– policies around paternity leave as well as financial support post-separation are important

Lessons learned

- MCS a great resource for longitudinal analysis of families, ideally have more information on contact/ parenting post separation
- Include time for data manager
- Appoint professional for dissemination

Outputs

Summary report

Two **Working Papers** based on the research are published in the LSE Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) series

- *Parenting and post-separation contact: what are the links? (link through)*
- *Parent with care and the impact of separation (link through)*

An **audio slideshow** about the research presented by Professor Lucinda Platt and Dr Tina Haux is available at <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/parenting-and-contact-and-after-separation>.

A number of **blogs** (LSE Public Policy) and podcasts

Acknowledgements

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Many thanks for listening!

- Any questions?