

Parenting and contact before and after separation

Tina Haux, University of Kent

Lucinda Platt, LSE

Rachel Rosenberg, Institute of Education

Research funded by the Nuffield Foundation

Content

1. Background
2. Research questions
3. Data
4. For each research question:
 - Sample and analysis
 - Results
5. Conclusions
6. Questions and discussion

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



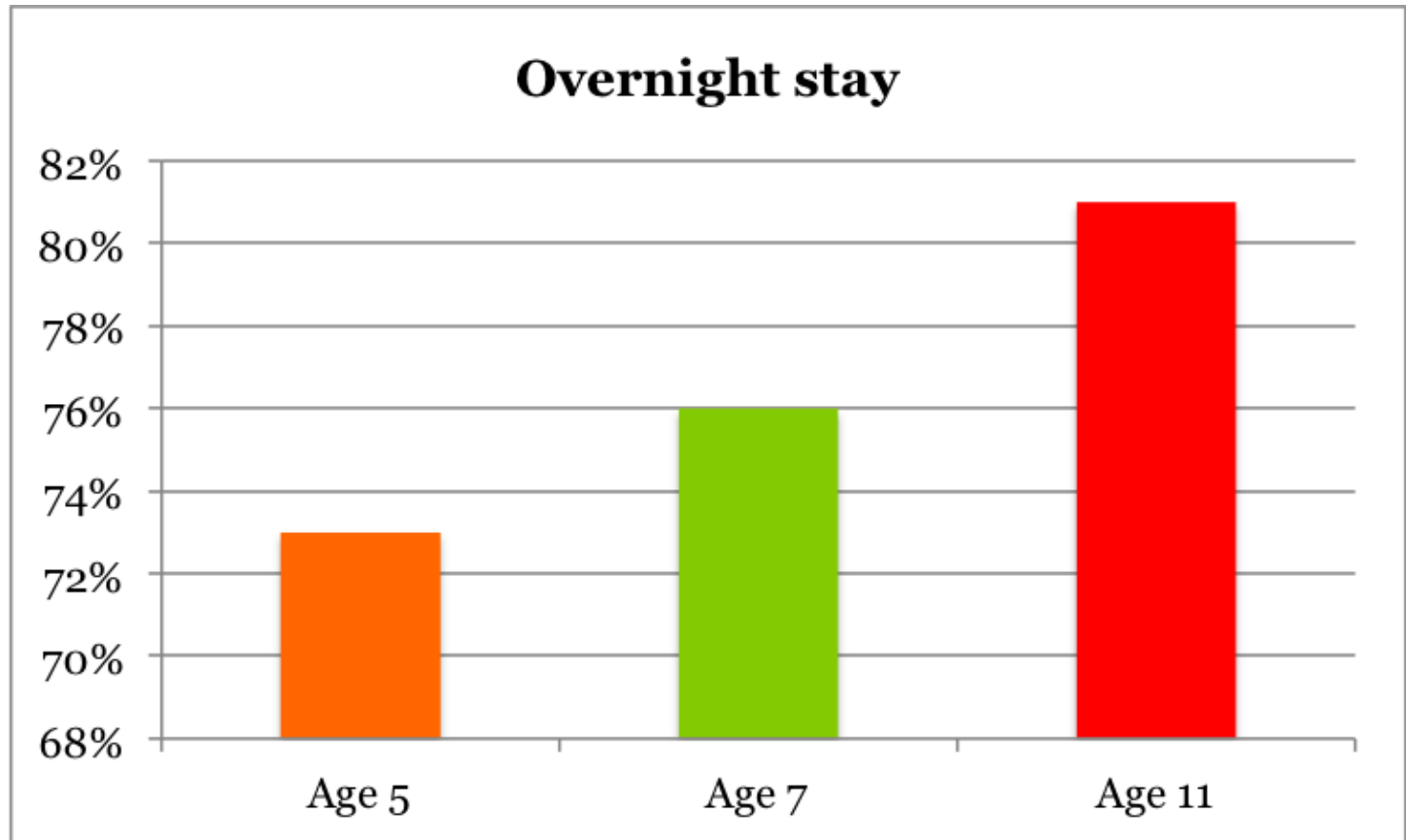
Newly separated dads and contact



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)

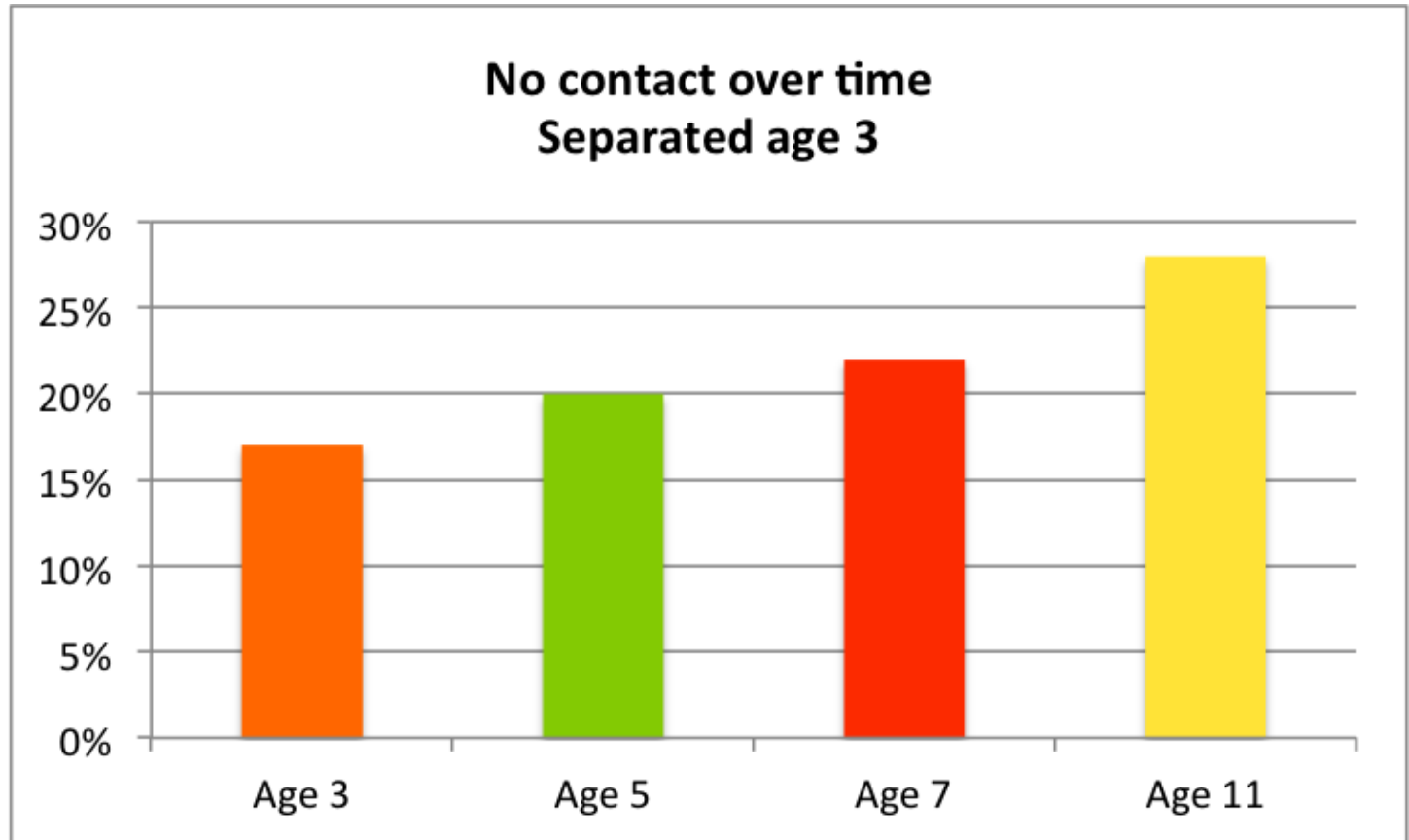
Overnight stays



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

The research has been funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The [Nuffield Foundation](#) has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

Contact details

Tina Haux - T.Haux@kent.ac.uk

Lucinda Platt - lplatt@lse.ac.uk





Many thanks for listening!

- Any questions?