Shared Parenting: an absence of robust research

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The UK’s leading Shared Parenting charity
Methodology and policy

• Approaches to research into shared parenting: impact on policy
• Need to examine the nature of these different approaches, in broad terms
• Then look at policy, especially given current Family Justice Review
Three broad approaches

• Large scale sample surveys, sometimes combined with interviews
• Small group interviews and surveys
• Meta-analyses of research
An example of large scale research

An example of small scale research

An example of a meta-analysis

- Amato and Gilbreth, Non resident fathers and children’s well being: A meta analysis’ [1999] Journal of Marriage and the Family
An example of meta-analysis going wrong

• “Amato (1993) summarised 32 studies of divorce that reported data on contact with non-custodial fathers and children’s well-being. Of these studies, 15 found that contact was associated significantly and positively with children’s well-being, 7 found that contact was associated significantly and negatively with children’s well-being and 10 found no significant association. Mixed results such as these have led many researchers to reach pessimistic conclusions about the importance of non-resident fathers.”
Is small scale research irrelevant for policy-makers?

• Handle with care!
How relevant is meta-analysis for policy-makers?

• More helpful but still handle with care
How useful are large scale projects for policy-makers?

• Much more robust than small-scale and meta-analysis
• Still need close examination
Policy implications I

• Bigger surveys and projects

• Where’s the funding in a post-CSR world?
Policy Implications 2

• The Family Justice Review is the best opportunity for radical change in the system for over 20 years.
FJR 1: A presumption of shared parenting

• Australian experience
• Legislation elsewhere
• The UK has fallen behind, having been well ahead
• How much do we know about shared parenting in the UK?
FJR 2: Legal Aid

• A question deserving research:

• How often is legal aid used to prolong the absence of the parent from the child’s life?
FJR 3: the role of Cafcass

• Questions for research:
• What proportions of Cafcass resources per annum on cases where abuse accused and where not?
• How many false and true accusations per annum identified by Cafcass?
Conclusions

• We need a lot more evidence on shared parenting in the UK
• and much more large scale collaborative research
• and the Family Justice Review sets a very tight timetable.