



Downward spiral: The impact of out-of-home placement on paternal welfare dependency☆



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ABSTRACT

In this article, we test how out-of-home placement affects men's labor market attachment, and in so doing we provide a novel parallel to existing research on how fatherhood affects men, which focuses almost exclusively on a child's arrival. Using population panel data from Denmark that include all first time fathers whose children were placed in out-of-home care from 1995 to 2005, we find that having a child placed in care is associated with up to a 4 percentage point increase in welfare dependency. Having a child placed in out-of-home care appear to aggravate conditions that likely necessitated the out-of-home placement to begin with, thereby likely necessitating longer duration of out-of-home placements. Thus, out-of-home placements have substantial secondary costs for parents and society.

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A large and growing literature has established that lack of socio-economic resources directly affects children's risk of experiencing maltreatment and out-of-home placements (Berger, Paxson, and Waldfogel, 2009; Bitler, Gelbach, & Hoynes, 2006; Cancian, Yang and Slack, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2009; Paxson & Waldfogel, 2003a, 2003b; Waldfogel, 2004; Wildeman and Fallesen, forthcoming), and that further decreasing such resources during an out-of-home placement prolongs the time children spend in care (Cancian et al., forthcoming). However, having a child placed into out-of-home care could also in itself aggravate the existing conditions in the family that created the need for an out-of-home placement in the first place. The aggravation would occur, if an out-of-home placement nullifies some of the positive influences research has shown children to have on especially their father's productive and pro-social behavior.

Becoming a father is a turning point that reshapes men's identities and behaviors (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1995). The impact on men's earnings and hours in paid labor has received special attention (e.g. Glauber, 2008; Killewald, 2013; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; Lundberg & Rose, 2002; Percheski & Wildeman, 2008) as a corollary to the motherhood wage

penalty (e.g. Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Gangl & Ziee, 2009). Children affect men's labor market behavior because fatherhood imposes time constraints and alters social identity, thereby positively influencing productive time use and other forms of pro-social behavior (Akerlof, 1998; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000; Waite, Haggstrom, & Kanouse, 1985; Warr, 1998). Yet, besides considering the arrival of children, research has paid little attention to how children's presence in men's lives (or lack thereof) affects productive behavior.

In this article, we study a new dimension of the role children play in men's lives, by examining how a child's departure by way of an out-of-home placement affects fathers' labor market behavior. Recent qualitative research indicates that parents experience loss of social identity when their children are taken into out-of-home placement (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2011; Buchbinder & Bareqet-Moshe, 2011; Schofield et al., 2011). If such negative psychological outcomes spill over into, for example, fathers' labor market performance, it might worsen what could already be a fragile social position.

Although it is unlikely that the average father will experience having his child placed out-of-home, it is still a not an uncommon phenomenon in Western countries. In countries such as Denmark, the UK, and the United States, between three to 6% of a birth cohort can expect to enter out-of-home placement during their childhood (Fallesen, Emanuel, & Wildeman, 2014; Ubbesen, Gilbert, & Thoburn, 2015; Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). Out-of-home placement occurs predominantly but not exclusively to children of men with low socioeconomic status (e.g. Andersen & Fallesen, 2010; Berger & Waldfogel, 2004; Ejrnæs, Ejrnæs, & Frederiksen, 2011). Children's departures may be a

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turning point that changes the children's fathers to ex-fathers. Such shocks to identity and time constraints could each separately impact fathers' labor market behavior. To conceptualize how out-of-home placements affect fathers, we combine theories on fatherhood with the role-theoretical process of becoming an ex (Ebaugh, 1988).

Understanding how fathers who are likely to have children placed outside home react has direct policy relevance. If men increase public dependency when their children enter care, it means we underestimate the costs of child welfare measures and that later reunification becomes more difficult as well (Cancian et al., forthcoming). To obtain a control group of fathers whose children are likely to enter out-of-home placement but do not, we use brothers of fathers whose children enter out-of-home placement—the children of the brothers in the control sample do not enter out-of-home placements. We include controls for family level fixed effects, ever having a child placed in out-of-home care, and birth order to account for confounding. Additionally, we allow the effect of out-of-home placement to vary across level of education and relationship status to study differential impact across likely protective factors.

1. Out-of-home placement, ex-fatherhood, and labor market behavior

In Denmark, recent research estimates the cumulative risk of a child ever to enter out-of-home care to fall between 0.03 and 0.06 (Fallesen et al., 2014; Ubbesen et al., 2015). American and English studies report findings in the similar range (Department of Health, 2000; Ubbesen et al., 2015; Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). Out-of-home placements of children predominantly—but not exclusively—happen to men from disadvantaged social backgrounds (e.g., Berger & Waldfogel, 2004), a group also heavily targeted by policies aimed at enhancing labor market participation.

The experience of having a child placed in out-of-home care causes feelings of grief and loss of rights and identity (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2011; Buchbinder & Bareqet-Moshe, 2011; Schofield et al., 2011). If the negative psychological outcome spills over into other parts of men's lives, having your child placed in out-of-home care might create additional barriers for men who already struggle to find and retain a job. Moreover, if out-of-home placement diminishes labor market attachment most among the most disadvantaged fathers, then out-of-home placements might exacerbate already existing inequalities both between placement and non-placement fathers and within the group of placement fathers.

Social scientists have given little to no consideration of how children's departures from fathers' lives affect these men's behavior (see however the above-mentioned), and no one has studied it using large-scale data (see however Lyngstad, 2013). Because of the lack of theoretical considerations and empirical studies, it is necessary to look elsewhere in order to understand why out-of-home placement should affect fathers' labor market attachment.

1.1. Leaving fatherhood

Fathers do of course not simply regress back to non-fatherhood when their children enter an out-of-home placement. Yet, as recent research shows, they appear to experience a loss of identity when their children enter care—something does change. Fatherhood is both a turning point in men's lives as well as a social role that men transition to (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Edin et al., 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1995). Having a child placed in out-of-home care marks a transition out of the functioning father-role—men are no longer charged with taking care of their child. In certain ways, they become ex-fathers (at least for a while). In her 1988 study of the ex-status, Ebaugh noticed that: "Exs tend to retain role residual or some kind of 'hangover identity' from a previous role as they move into new social roles" (1988, p. 5). Remnants of the father role persists for a while in ex-fatherhood, but the child is not around anymore, so the constraints imposed by both the child's physical presence and the social role of fatherhood erode.

1.2. Ex-fatherhood and labor supply

Men on average increase their labor supply when they become fathers (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; Percheski & Wildeman, 2008; Weinschenker, 2015). Fathers' increase in earnings (fatherhood wage premium) is also well established in the literature (e.g., Glauber, 2008; Hersch & Stratton, 2000; Hodges & Budig, 2010; Lundberg & Rose, 2002; see however Kunze, 2014). Whether we should expect them to decrease it when entering ex-fatherhood depends on the mechanism that governs fathers' labor market behavior. Previous research has used identity theory to argue that the role of father prompts men to increase productive behavior, working through biological ties, co-residence with the child, and marriage to the child's birthmother (e.g., Killewald, 2013). Ex-fatherhood is then the 'hangover identity' of fatherhood without the enforcement of pro-social behavior inherent in the father-role. An out-of-home placement could both erode the fatherhood identity and remove the incentive to work that was until then driven by the financial responsibility of caring for a child.

1.3. Protective factors

An out-of-home placement is an event that changes fatherhood to ex-fatherhood, thereby also changing social behavior through role-disintegration and the weakening of social bonds. Yet, the effect may vary across social and institutional contexts. Previous research emphasizes the importance of co-residence between children and their fathers for children to fully affect their fathers (Killewald, 2013). Single fathers, who tend not to live with their children even when the child is not in an out-of-home placement (Olsen, Larsen, & Lange, 2005), could react differently than fathers living with the biological mother. In addition, differences in occupational opportunities between fathers could mediate the impact of out-of-home placement on labor market attachment, because low educated fathers are more likely to work in more directly supervised jobs, and thus will have a harder time hiding a drop in productivity caused by an out-of-home placement of their child(ren).

1.3.1. Lack of everyday pre-placement contact as a protective factor

For an out-of-home placement to affect a father, the child has to be a part of his life prior to the placement. The fatherhood literature has established that regular contact with their children is a prerequisite for men to change their behavior and be involved as fathers (e.g. Bellamy, Thullen, & Hans, 2015; Killewald, 2013; Knoester, Petts, & Eggebeen, 2007). Men who do not live with their children are less involved in their children's lives (Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010), although not necessarily uninvolved (Danziger & Radin, 1990).

Men who have regular contact with their children through cohabitation experience a larger reinforcement of the father-role than men who do not live with the child, leading co-residing men to act more like fathers (Killewald, 2013). If (a) children enforce co-residing men's father-identity stronger than they do for non-co-residing men; and (b) an out-of-home placements truly lead to loss of identity (or at least the acquiring of an ex-identity), then lack of everyday contact with their children may protect men for part of the impact of an out-of-home placement on their identity, and thereby also on their labor market behavior. It of course important to remember that it is not random which fathers live with their children and which do not, and that the reasons for an out-of-home placement may correlate with the living situation.

1.3.2. Differences in reasons for and responses to out-of-home placements

Fathers with lower levels of education often work in hourly paid positions with lower wages (e.g., Goldthorpe, 2000). Lower wages goes hand in hand with higher degree of supervision, direct monitoring of work effort, as well as lower levels of job autonomy (e.g., Allgulin & Ellingsen, 2002; Kruse, 1992; Sessions & Theodoropoulos, 2008). So low-educated, low-wage fathers likely hold labor market positions that make it harder for them to hide a temporary personal crisis from employers.

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