

Fathers' time with children between accessibility and direct engagement

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This paper concerns the time use of fathers and focuses on selected qualitative and quantitative aspects of the time men spend with their children. Data from the German Time Use Survey 2001/2002 are used to compute two estimates of paternal involvement: 1) total time a man spends with his children and 2) time that childcare activities are reported as his primary or secondary activity.

A quantitative comparison of these two concepts shows that for fathers the extent of the total time spent with children is three times as high as the duration of time spent for childcare in the closer sense. Obviously the time that fathers spend with their children contains large components of "standby" or supervisory time, where there is no direct father/child-interaction. The time fathers are accessible to their children without being directly engaged with them, is more closely analysed by the question of what main activities fathers do whilst they are on "standby" for children.

Furthermore this paper reports to what extent mothers are physically present during childcare by fathers in the tighter sense, as well as during the whole time fathers spend with their children. In this way, the empirical findings allow a more in-depth look at the nature of time fathers and children share together on weekdays and on the weekend than analyses restricted to absolute and relative levels of paternal involvement allow.