

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: "MEN IN FAMILIES"

SUZANNE M. BIANCHI, GUEST EDITOR

When Robert Mare first contacted me about editing a special issue on "Men in Families," the question we discussed at some length was whether there was enough high-quality social demographic work on men to constitute a special issue. We agreed that submissions to the special issue would undergo the same review process as any other manuscript submitted to *Demography*, and we would make a final decision about the special issue after the reviews were in. Now, 18 months after I agreed to edit the issue, it is with great pleasure that I present an issue devoted to the topic of "Men in Families." My hope is that the readers of *Demography* will find much in this issue that informs and stimulates further research on gender (men and women) and the family.

One of the things that struck me early on in the review process for this issue was how different the concerns about men's roles in the family were in developing economies and industrialized nations. Unfortunately, there were very few submissions on developing countries. The one that you will find in this issue, by Dodoo, illustrates the importance of broadening the focus of contraceptive use and fertility studies to include men. With regard to fertility and family planning, men's and women's desires for children may not be the same, and, as Dodoo shows, in some contexts it may be men's desires that are more often realized.

In advanced industrial nations, such as the United States, men's involvement in child support and childrearing is more often the focus of research than is their participation in decision-making about childbearing. The articles in this issue reflect this: To date, most family demographic research on men has concentrated on the *absence* more than the presence of men in families. In this issue, you will find some of the latest and most definitive research on questions of custody, child support, and father-child contact when fathers do not live with their children.

Cancian and Meyer investigate trends over time in shared custody—not just legal custody but actual physical custody of children. Seltzer provides the best evidence available about whether granting fathers joint *legal* custody of their children after divorce "causes" these fathers to remain more involved with their children. Cooksey and Craig

consider fathers' involvement with children when fathers do not live with children and examine a wider array of marital and family conditions of fathers than has characterized past research. Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith focus on the issue of child support: whether child support improves children's well-being and whether the effect goes beyond the provision of money. Using an extremely rich data set on low-income fathers who were never married to the mothers of their children, Rangarajan and Gleason move beyond the group of absent fathers most often studied, divorced fathers, and look at how much low-income, unmarried fathers "do" for their children.

In agreeing to edit the special issue, my hope was that I would not end up devoting an issue solely to studies of absent fathers. I am pleased to include articles that focus on fathers who live with their children. Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer examine whether fathers' involvement in two-parent families benefits children in ways that go beyond or augment mothers' involvement. Clarke, Cooksey, and Verropoulou's comparison of fathers in Britain and the United States looks at all fathers, not just noncustodial fathers. The research note by Casper and O'Connell provides trend data on child care by a subset of married fathers, those with preschool-aged children and employed wives. Finally, the research note by Koball takes up the question of marriage in black men's lives and provides perspective on the historical trend in marriage for black men and white men.

In sum, I believe that this issue provides an important description and analysis of men's involvement in families: father custody and its effects, the payment and meaning of child support, fathers' care of children, father-child contact, and unmarried fathers' involvement with children. My hope for future research is that more attention will be devoted to men's family activities in two-parent families as well as in noncustodial situations, and to men's participation in decision-making about childbearing and contraceptive use. The goal is to understand when and in what ways men's involvement in the family matters—for men, women, and children. If this volume moves us in that direction—and I think it does—it will have been a successful undertaking.