

Study examines father-child relations

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An Australian researcher is conducting what could be a world-first study of factors influencing the relationships between men and their children.

Queensland University of Technology researcher Nicole Morel is examining father involvement in two-parent families, looking at how children affect the level of care they are given and how fathers respond to their children.

The researcher is looking for between 500 and 600 families with children aged from three to around six or seven years old for the ground-breaking study.

"At this point, we are trying to understand father involvement a little bit more than what research has looked at before," she said.

Traditionally, she said, the involvement of fathers in looking after children had been looked at as a negotiation between the mother and father.

But these days many men were now primary caregivers because more mothers were in the workplace, Ms Morel said.

The need for two incomes to buy the average Australian home in most capital cities of Australia meant that most fathers were no longer simply breadwinners.

"Where we are situated right now suggests that there is greater need for fathers to be involved and that gender roles are changing in that way because of that," she said.

"It's another reason why looking at father involvement is important."

Ms Morel said an earlier study, which formed part of her honours degree, showed a child's preference for care from their father impacted significantly on the level and types of care their father gave.

It also was widely accepted that children benefited when fathers were more involved in their care.

"Involvement of fathers with their children is beneficial for children while they are growing up as it helps their developing self-esteem, learning and socialising," Ms Morel said.

There were also long-term benefits, such as helping children gain more satisfaction from their lives later on and being less prone to psychological distress.

Ms Morel said she expected to finish analysing the results in about a year.

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