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Media Relations

February 3, 2015

UNH Research Finds More Married Fathers Providing Child Care after the Great Recession

DURHAM, N.H. – In the wake of the Great Recession, the share of married fathers providing child care for their children under age 15 while their mothers worked rose from 27 percent in 2005 to 31 percent in 2011, according to new research from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

“The recession is drawing attention to a trend that has been emerging for some time,” said Kristin Smith, family demographer at the Carsey School and research associate professor of sociology at UNH. “Fathers are spending more time with their children and their involvement in the family has increased since at least the 1970s.”

The rise in father-provided child care was driven primarily by the rise in child care provided by black and Hispanic fathers, Smith found. From 2005 to 2011, the share of black married fathers providing care rose by 11 percentage points (25 to 36 percent); among Hispanic fathers the number rose by seven percentage points (27 to 34 percent). During that same time period the number of rural and urban married fathers providing child care began to diverge. In 2005 they were equally as likely to provide care but by 2011 the share of urban married fathers providing care had increased by four percentage points.

“That black and Hispanic fathers increased their involvement in the care of their children by substantial amounts is noteworthy,” Smith said.

“These fathers experienced large decreases in employment, yet employment rates of white fathers also decreased, although to a lesser extent, and no discernable increase in father-provided child care ensued among white married fathers.”

Smith notes in her research that increased reliance on fathers as care providers has broad implications.

“Research shows that children with involved, caring fathers have better educational outcomes and are more emotionally secure,” Smith said.

“In addition, mothers’ labor force outcomes may improve with increased father involvement in child care. Research shows that married fathers are typically engaged in both market work and the care of their children. Policies to support working families, such as paid sick leave and paid family leave, are not only critical for employed mothers but for employed fathers as well.”

The Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire is a nationally acclaimed resource for research, leadership development, and engaged scholarship relevant to public policy. The school addresses the most pressing challenges of the 21st century, striving for innovative, responsive, and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the private, nonprofit, and civic sectors.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

Editors, Producers: The complete report about this research is available at
<http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1233&context=carsey>

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