

How Do Men's Work Lives Change After Fatherhood?

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is the association between the transition to fatherhood and men's work effort. We test three hypotheses: 1) that the transition to fatherhood is associated with an increase in work effort; 2) that the positive association (if any) between the transition to fatherhood and work effort is greater for fathers who are married at the time of the transition; and 3) that the association (if any) is greater for men who make the transition at younger ages. The data are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 Cohort. We find that the transition to fatherhood is associated with an increase in work effort among unmarried men who make the transition before age 30, but we do not observe such an association for married men.

Introduction

Background

There is abundant evidence that men's decisions about fatherhood are linked to men's opportunities, expectations, experiences and decisions about paid work. Among married men, becoming a father is associated with both increased hours at work (Sanchez and Thomson 1997) and increased income (Nock 1998). Work affects some men's psychological capacity for parenting. Edin and her colleagues for example (Edin, Lein and Nelson 2002), report that many poor men attribute positive changes in their work lives to increased motivation on becoming a father or at the birth of a particular child. Non-custodial poor fathers report that their ability to spend time with their children and to provide them with non-monetary nurturance is greatly affected by their ability to provide for them financially. This is partly because custodial parents or guardians limit nonresidential parents' access to children when money is not forthcoming (Pearson and Thoennes 1998). The relationship between fathering and work among non-custodial parents is not simply a consequence of custodial mothers' gatekeeping, however. Poor men also report deliberately staying away from their children when they are not working steadily, because they feel that they should not have extensive contact with children they are not able to financially support (Crowley 1998; Edin, Lein and Nelson 2002).

Past research on work and fatherhood has generally been directed toward answering research questions about specific groups of fathers. For example, some researchers focus on *non-custodial fathers* (Argys and Peters 2001; Argys, Peters and Waldman 2001); others on *unmarried fathers* (Carlson, McLanahan and England 2004); others on *fathers who are both custodial and married* (Nock 1998; Sanchez and Thomson 1997) still others on low income African American men (Roy 2005). Because

we lack research on the link between fatherhood and work that focuses on *all men* we also lack an understanding of whether there are differences in the association by marital status and their direction and magnitude if so.

Toward the end of gaining such an understanding, in this paper we examine how men's work effort, measured by hours worked, changes when men make the transition to fatherhood either as married men or unmarried men. Our theoretical orientation is to the life course perspective which has three implications for our study. First, our premise is that people are always involved in multiple domains of life (e.g. sexual partnership, work, school, parenthood, caring for elderly loved ones, community service) at the same time (Elder 1998). Thus, *coordination* across these different domains—such as work and fatherhood-- is necessary. Second, men make decisions about work and fatherhood within different *social contexts* and these contexts change the costs and benefits associated with decisions about work and fatherhood. Third, we do not regard work and fatherhood as statuses but rather *developmental processes* that change in content and meaning across time with a person's age and with duration as a worker or father.

The Nature of Linkages between Fatherhood, Work and Marriage

JOINT DECISIONS At the individual level, decisions in different realms of life are often linked because people make joint decisions about them. A simple hypothesis is that *men increase their work effort in response to becoming a father* in order to meet the added expenses a child engenders. It is possible, however, that joint decision-making about work and fatherhood means that men anticipate the added expenses of parenthood, and wait until they are working enough to support a child to become a

father. This idea of joint decision making suggests that the association between work and fatherhood may not actually be as strong as it appears in cross-sectional analyses. Ahituv and Lerman have an up-to-date discussion and literature review of an analogous theme regarding work and marriage (Ahituv and Lerman 2007; see also Flouri and Buchanan 2002).

SOCIAL CONTEXT Decisions about work and fatherhood do not take place in a vacuum, but within specific social contexts (Hogan and Astone 1986; Shanahan 2000). These social contexts can intensify or reduce the association between work and fatherhood by changing the costs and benefits associated with the decision to become a father or to work at a certain level by providing linkages between them. Social contexts can provide an *organizational* basis for links, such as when employers facilitate parental work by providing on-site childcare. The links can also be *institutional*, such as when the government provides unique job opportunities for mothers who receive public assistance, but not for the fathers of their children. Finally, they can be *normative*, such as when there are culturally prescribed expectations that fathers provide financial support and men who fail to fulfill these expectations are informally stigmatized. An example of the latter is the finding reported above that some poor men avoid their children because they are embarrassed that they are not financially supporting those children.

We are concerned here with how the social context of *marriage* affects the association between fatherhood and work effort. The simple hypothesis is that *fathers who are married to the mothers of their children are more likely to maintain a high work effort than fathers who were not married to the mothers of their children*. One basis for

this hypothesized link is organizational; married men are far more likely than unmarried men to share a household with their children. This gives married men, on average, a higher intrinsic motivation to work hard after fatherhood than unmarried men in order to maintain household consumption levels in the presence of the added expenses of children.

The percentage of unmarried fathers who live with their children has increased over time, however, and this organizational difference between married fathers and unmarried fathers has undoubtedly declined concomitantly. In addition, the institutional context unmarried men face in terms of their legal obligation to support their children is more stringent now than in the past (Garfinkel, Meyer and McLanahan 1998). One of the explicit, intended consequences of this shift in child support policy over time was to increase fathers' work effort if it was necessary to enable them to support their children¹. There was also hope that increasing the stringency of child support would lead to a reduction in non-marital fertility among men who could not afford to support children (Hao, Astone and Cherlin 2007). This selective reduction in non-marital fertility would, in turn, lead to a larger percentage of unmarried fathers being in a position to support their children.

In sum, although there are reasons to hypothesize that the link between fatherhood and work is stronger among married than unmarried men, there are also reasons why this difference might have eroded substantially over time. It is likely that: 1) the large percentage of unmarried fathers who share a household with their children and their mothers now; 2) the increased normative pressure on unmarried men to

¹ Some feared that an unintended consequence of the policy change would be a decrease in men's work hours, given one of the major forms that increased stringency took was the attachment of wages. This does not appear to have happened (Freeman and Waldfogel 1998).

support their children; and 3) the increased stringency of child support policy will render the differences between married and unmarried fathers small or non-existent.

AGE AND DURATION The Life Course Perspective calls attention to the fact that people who experience the same event (for example becoming a father) at different ages, may have systematically different experiences of that life event. There is a large literature on early childbearing among women that considers "off-time" and "on-time" childbearing in exactly this context (Astone and Upchurch 1994). There is a smaller, analogous literature on the timing of fatherhood (Bachrach and Sonenstein 1998; Cooney et al. 1993; Eggebeen and Litcher 1991).

If one assumes that the transition to fatherhood does have a positive association with work effort it is possible that the *positive association is larger for men who become fathers at a younger age*. Older men are more likely than younger men to have settled into a pattern of full time work before becoming fathers, while younger men are less likely to be working at full capacity at the time of fatherhood, if for example, they are still in school (Martinez and Day 1999). In addition, the younger the man, the more likely the transition to fatherhood is unplanned, making it less likely that an increase in work effort is taken in anticipation of fatherhood.

Summary

In our analysis we test three broad hypotheses about work and fatherhood: 1) that the transition to fatherhood is associated with an increase in work effort; 2) that the positive association (if any) between the transition to fatherhood and work effort is greater for fathers who are married at the time of the transition; and 3) that the

association (if any) is greater for men who make the transition at younger ages. Our hypothesis testing is done in light of the issues our conceptual model, elucidated above, calls attention to, and that might lead to failure to reject the null of these hypotheses, especially for the first two. Our premise that men make joint decisions about work and fatherhood suggests that there may be only a small association between fatherhood and work, since many men anticipate fatherhood by increasing work effort or wait to become fathers until they are working as much as they can. Our discussion of how the social context of marriage modifies the association between fatherhood and work identified reasons why married men may exhibit a stronger association between fatherhood and work than unmarried men, as hypothesized, but also identified reasons why this might be less true now than in the past.

Data and Methods

Data

The data for our study are taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth: 1979 Cohort (NLSY79). The NLSY79 is a nationally representative sample of young people who were aged 14 through 21 in 1979 and who have been interviewed annually until 1992 and biennially since then.

The NLSY79 comprises three independent probability samples: 1) a cross-sectional sample representative of the non-institutionalized civilian population of young people born from 1957 to 1964; 2) a sample of minority and low income youth born at the same time; and 3) a sample of young people of the same age serving in the military. In our analyses we use data exclusively from the first, nationally representative sample. We eliminate female respondents. This gave us an initial sample of 2800 men. Since

we are interested in how the transition to fatherhood changes men's work effort, we limit our analysis to men who become fathers. We further limited the sample to men who became fathers before age 35, since, as we describe below, we will only be examining men's work lives from ages 18 to 34. Our final n was 1781.

The unit of analysis for our study is the *person/quarter*. Each man contributes an observation for every quarter year he was observed from ages 18 and 34. Below and above these age cutoffs there were too few men or on too few quarters where men were working to reliably estimate the models. The total number of observations (person-quarters) we observe between ages 18 to 34 among men who became fathers before age 35 is 121,108.

Variables

OUTCOME VARIABLE The outcome variable for our study is median *number of hours worked in a month for a given quarter year*. The NLSY79 provides data on each respondent's labor force activity for each week of the calendar year prior to the interview, including the total number of hours worked at each job. We aggregated this weekly data to data for months. Using the person quarter file (described above) we created an outcome variable that gives each man's median monthly work hours for each quarter. Men who worked 40 hours per week for each week of the entire quarter would receive a score of 160 on this variable.

In Figure 1 we show a box and whiskers plot, excluding extreme values (i.e. over 240)², for the person quarters observed between age 18 and 34 for five groups. The groups are: 1) all men; 2) all men who became fathers; 3) men who became fathers

² In the analyses reported here we included the outliers. We did several checks to see how robust our results were to the inclusion or exclusion of extreme values and report on these checks below.

before age 25; 4) all men who became fathers between ages 25 and 29; and 5) all men who became fathers between ages 30 and 34. The figure shows that, for all groups the median is approximately 160 hours or a value that indicates full time work and that there is very little variation across the five groups in the right tail of the distribution. Men who become fathers are distinguished from all men primarily in the left tail of the distribution; among all men there are more who work substantially less than full time. The distribution of hours worked is similar for men who become fathers after age 25 (i.e. no differences between those who become dads from 25-29 and those who become dads from 30-34). Among men who become fathers before age 25 there are more men who work less than full time.

MAJOR PREDICTOR The major predictor variable in our analysis is *family status* in a given quarter. For each person/quarter year, a man receives a score on this variable corresponding to his family status during the last month of the quarter in question. An advantage of this procedure is that it allows us to pick up work changes that immediately preceded an anticipated change in family status. Our predictor variable distinguishes among four statuses a man could have in a quarter: 1) unmarried and childless; 2) married and childless; 3) unmarried father³; and 4) married father. For spells after the transition to fatherhood, men remain in the same family status category regardless of subsequent marital transitions, since we are interested only in their marital status at the time of the birth.

³ There are problems with measuring cohabitation in the NLSY79 and due to these problems we are not able to distinguish unmarried fathers who are cohabiting with the mothers of their children and those who are not.

Overall, 77.3% of men became fathers after marriage. As we describe below, we stratify our analysis by age at first fatherhood. The first stratum is men who became fathers before age 25 (n=818) and among these 65.8% became fathers after marriage. The second stratum is men who became fathers between ages 25 and 29 (n=602) among whom 85.5 became fathers after marriage and the third stratum is men who became fathers between ages 30 and 34 (n=361) among whom 89.5 became fathers after marriage.

It is known that men under-report births outside marriage in general, and particularly at young ages (Cherlin and Griffith 1998; Rendall et al. 1999). We assume that there is some under-reporting in our data as well. It is possible, because of the prospective nature of the NLSY79, that there is somewhat less under-reporting than in other data, since men are reporting about each birth closer in time to when it occurred. Moreover, if men under-report births from dissolved partnerships more than from current partnerships, it is more likely, in a prospective study, that the partnership is still intact at the time of the report than in a retrospective birth history.

CONTROL VARIABLES We include a number of control variables in our multivariate analysis. We include men of three *ethnic backgrounds* in our analysis: European Americans/other (non-hispanic whites, Asian Americans, missing ethnicity), African Americans (non-hispanic blacks) and Latinos. We also control for each man's score on the *Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT)* which NLSY respondents took in 1979.

Descriptive statistics on the major predictor and the control variables are in Table 1. Since ethnicity and AFQT do not vary over time we present statistics for *individuals* in the first panel of the table. Educational attainment and family status do vary within

persons over time and we therefore present statistics on these for *person-quarters* in the second panel of Table 1. Table 1 contains statistics for five groups: all men, men who became fathers before age 35 (our overall study sample), and the three analytic strata.

Analysis

GENERAL APPROACH We use methods called growth models by developmental psychologists (Burchinal, Bailey and Snyder 1994; Burchinal, Campbell and Bryant 1997; Burchinal and Appelbaum 1991), hierarchical linear models by sociologists (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992) and random effects models by economists (Behrman, Kohler and Watkins 2002). The use of this kind of model is more appropriate when there is reason to believe that the predictor (in this case the transition to fatherhood) and the outcome (in this case work effort) are decisions that, to some extent, are taken jointly.

Since one of our central concerns is in whether or not the association between the transition to fatherhood and work effort varies by the timing of fatherhood and if so, how we stratified our analysis by the age a man became a father. Preliminary analysis indicated that the appropriate strata were men who became fathers before age 25⁴, from age 25 to 29 and 30 to 34⁵.

FUNCTIONAL FORM The outcome variable, hours worked, is censored because all men who do not work in a given quarter receive a score of 0. The appropriate statistical model for a censored outcome is a tobit model (Tobin 1958). In addition, our

⁴ Preliminary analysis indicated that men who became fathers before age 20 were not different, with respect to the associations between family status and work effort, than men who became fathers before age 25. We therefore combined these groups to increase power.

⁵ Obviously, we cannot estimate the association between the transition to fatherhood and work effort between ages 18 and 34 among men who became fathers after age 34.

observations are not independent because a single man contributes many observations to our study sample. Therefore we estimated our models using the xtobit procedure in the STATA statistical package which was designed for longitudinal analyses of censored outcomes.

The tobit coefficient may be decomposed into two useful parts (McDonald and Moffitt 1980). The first part is an estimate of the association between a predictor variable and the probability that, for a given observation, the outcome is not censored. In our case, this is the probability that a man works at all during a given quarter. The second term of the decomposition is an estimate of the association between the predictor and the magnitude of the outcome if not censored. In our case, it is an estimate of the association between a predictor and the number of hours a working man worked. The decomposition formula is a function of the percent of total observations that are uncensored, which obviously differs quite a bit for the three age at fatherhood groups that we examine.

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS In a substantial (10%) number of quarters men reported working a median number of hours in a month that was equivalent to working 60 or more hours per week for the month. Although the observations that were outliers accounted for only 10% of the observations (i.e. person-quarters), upon further scrutiny we determined that over three quarters of the men contributed at least one outlying observation. We re-ran all the analyses we report below in two ways. First, we re-ran them including the outlying observations but re-coding the high observations to 240 (the equivalent of working 60 hours per week). Second, we re-ran the analyses excluding

person quarters that were over 240. These robustness checks suggested that the results we report below (on the full sample) are not affected by the outliers.

Results

In Table 2, we present the most important results of our regression analysis. Note that the numbers in Table 2 are not tobit coefficients, rather they are the result of two post-regression analytic steps.

First, we decomposed the tobit coefficients into their two components. As we explained above these components are the association between family status and the probability of not being censored—in our case of working during the quarter at all—and the association between family status and the number of hours worked *among those who were working*.

Second, our model included three dummy variables indicating married and childless, unmarried dad and married dad; the tobit coefficients that resulted from this procedure were estimates of the contrast between each of these three groups, respectively, and the omitted category: unmarried and childless. Since one other contrast (e.g. that between married dad and married childless) was of interest to us we also estimated it by constructing a linear combinations of the relevant tobit coefficients and testing the significance of the contrast⁶.

In the second, third and fourth columns of Table 2, we present the association between a man's family status and the probability that he is in the labor force in a given quarter for the three age at fatherhood groups. In the fifth, sixth and seventh columns,

⁶ This is equivalent to operationalizing our major predictor with a different omitted category.

we present the association between a man's family status and the number of hours he worked if he was working for the three groups.

Looking at the first row of Table 2, our results suggest that unmarried men work more after making the transition to fatherhood than before, and this association is stronger among men who make the transition to fatherhood early, relative to unmarried childless men of the same age. Among unmarried men who become fathers before age 25 the transition to fatherhood is associated with a 7% increase in the probability of being in the labor force, and an approximately 14 hour increase in the number of hours worked among the working. There is also a positive association between the transition to fatherhood and work effort among unmarried men who become fathers between 25 and 29, but it is smaller (the confidence intervals of the estimates do not overlap). The association disappears when we examine unmarried men who become fathers after age 30.

The second row of Table 2, with one exception, shows that the transition to fatherhood is not associated with an increase in work effort among married men, no matter what age the men become fathers. In fact, married men who become fathers between 25 and 29 actually seem to work less after fatherhood than before. An exception (not shown in Table 2, but apparent in Appendix Table 1) is among married African American men who become fathers before age 25, who do increase their work effort quite a bit, but this should be interpreted in light of the very small size of this group.

In the third row of Table 2 we also present a result that does not bear directly on our hypotheses, but might be useful in interpreting our findings, namely: the association between marriage and work effort. In the third row of Table 2 we present the contrast in

work effort between married childless men and unmarried childless men, which is positive for men who become fathers before 30 (i.e. in our younger two strata).

Discussion

To summarize our results, we found mixed support for the hypotheses. We find that some men, but not others increase their work effort after fatherhood, as the first hypothesis predicted. The differences among men in the association between the transition to fatherhood and work bear directly on the second and third hypotheses. With respect to differences in this association by marital status, we found the opposite of what our second hypothesis predicts: that is, only unmarried men increase their work effort; married men do not. As we predicted in the third hypothesis, the transition to fatherhood is associated with a bigger increase in work effort among unmarried men who become fathers at younger ages than unmarried men who become fathers at older ages. There is some age variation in the association between fatherhood and work effort among married men, but it is not the variation we hypothesized: married men who become fathers in their late twenties work less after fatherhood than before and this negative association between fatherhood and work is not apparent among married men who become fathers earlier or later in life.

It appears from our results that men under 30 increase their work effort when they begin to form their families, regardless of whether they begin the family formation process with fatherhood or marriage. Our results also suggest that men's work lives are largely established and independent of family transitions when these transitions occur after age 30.

One line of speculation about the overall pattern of our results concerns the intendedness of births and this issue bears directly on joint decision making. It is reasonable to assume that younger men are more likely to have an unplanned births than older men and unmarried men are more likely to have unplanned births than married men. An interpretation of our findings is that when the transition to fatherhood is planned, the timing of the transition is explicitly coordinated with decisions about work such that the process is more properly thought of as a unitary decision. In cases when the transition to fatherhood is unplanned however, men do respond to the transition by increasing work effort.

Our unexpected finding that some married men (those who become fathers in their late 20s) actually reduce their work effort at fatherhood is suggestive that these men, like so many women, are reallocating their time from paid work in the labor force to work at home taking care of children. If so, however, it is not obvious why we do not see this association among men who make the transition to fatherhood at younger or older ages. One explanation is age differentials in wages. It could be that younger married men do not earn enough to be able to afford to reduce their work effort at all, while and older married men make enough more than married men in their late twenties that purchasing child care is a better option.

In sum, our results extend our understanding of how the transition to fatherhood is embedded in men's work lives. They support the idea that, for many men, especially older, married men for whom decisions about family life are most likely conscious and deliberate, these decisions are so intertwined with decisions about work that they are best thought of as a unitary process. They also support the idea, that under other

circumstances, some men do respond to the transition to fatherhood by working more in a pattern that is suggestive of separate decision making.

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Table 1. Univariate Statistics for Predictor and Control Variables

<i>Variables</i>		<i>All Men</i>	<i>All Dads</i>	<i>Dad Before 25</i>	<i>Dad 25 to 29</i>	<i>Dad 30 to 34</i>
<i>By Person</i>						
<i>Ethnicity</i>		%	%	%	%	%
	Latino	7.8	8.6	11.4	5.8	6.9
	African American	12.4	13.4	19.9	8.1	7.2
	European American	79.9	78.0	68.7	86.0	85.9
	<i>n of men</i>	2800	1781	818	602	361
<i>Armed Forces Qualifying Tests</i>						
	mean	44.3	42.7	34.1	47.3	53.7
	standard deviation	26.2	25.9	23.5	25.0	26.4
	<i>n of men</i>	2625	1682	761	573	348
<i>By Person-Quarter</i>						
<i>Education</i>		%	%	%	%	%
	less than high school	17.2	18.1	27.6	12.8	10.4
	high school graduate	44.4	45.7	54.6	44.3	35.1
	some college	21.7	20.1	14.2	23.2	24.2
	college degree or more	16.8	16.1	3.6	19.8	30.3
	<i>n of person quarters</i>	165401	117619	49224	37129	22428
<i>Family Status</i>						
	Unmarried/Childless	50.2	32.7	16.1	39.3	59.1
	Married/Childless	15.1	12.8	5.2	16.2	24.1
	Unmarried/Dad	10.1	15.9	28.8	6.8	1.8
	Married/Dad	24.6	38.7	49.9	37.6	14.9
	<i>n of person-quarters</i>	190400	121108	55624	40936	24548

Table 2. Associations of Family Transitions and Control Variables with the Probability of Working and the Number of Hours Worked Among those Working.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Association with Probability of Working</i>			<i>Association with Number of Hours Among Working</i>		
	< 25	25-29	30-34	< 25	25-29	30-34
	unmarried dad vs. unmarried childless	7.04	2.45	-1.47	13.69	5.48
married dad vs. married childless	0.76	-2.19	-0.58	1.47	-4.89	-1.41
married childless vs. unmarried childless	3.84	2.69	0.59	7.46	6.02	1.42

Boldface indicates the estimate is significantly different from 0 at conventional levels

Work and Fatherhood

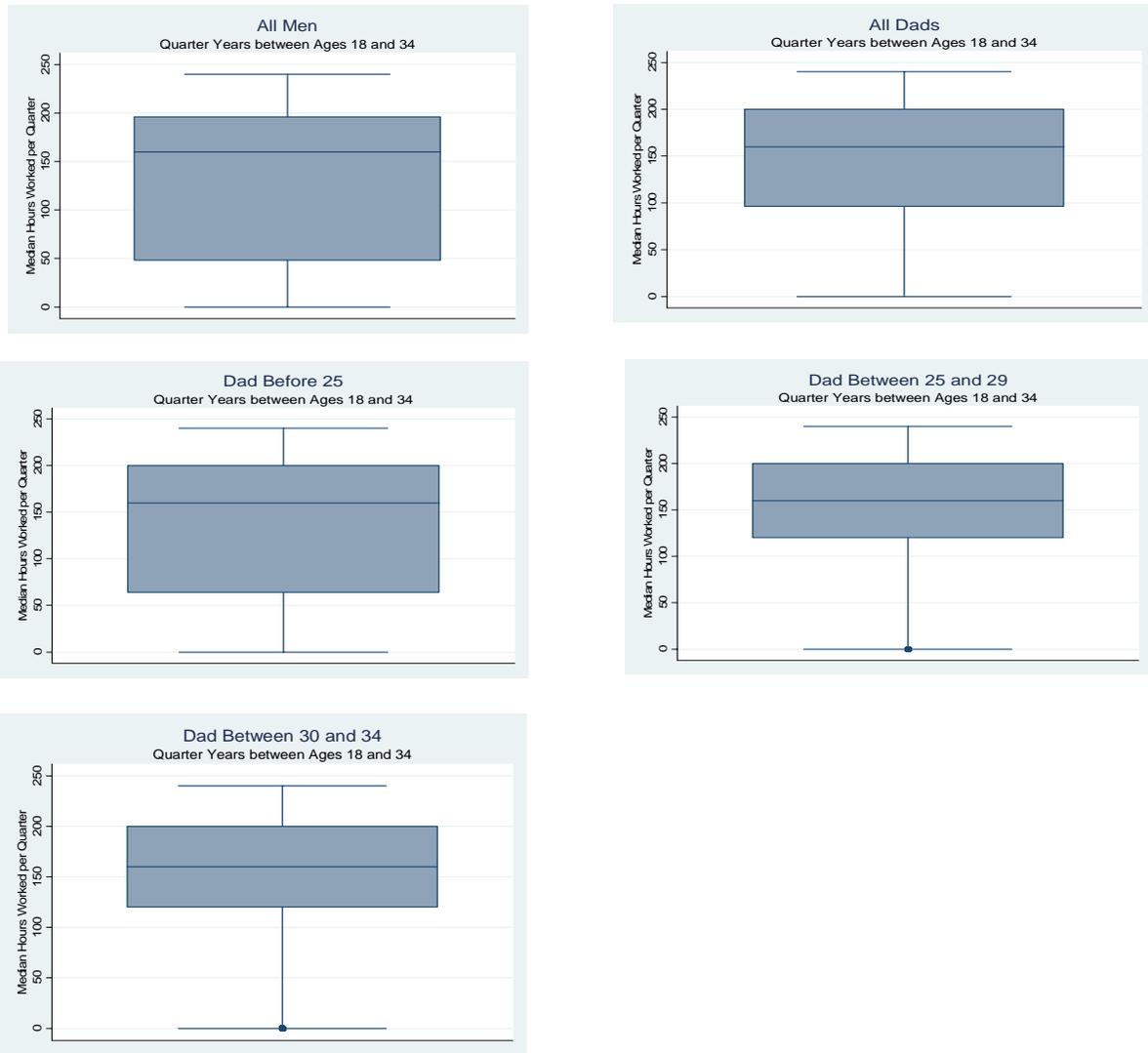


Figure 1. Distribution of Median Hours Worked Per Quarter by Sample Status (outliers recoded to 240).

Table A1. Tobit Coefficients for Hours Worked on Family Status and Control Variables by Age at Fatherhood

<i>Variable</i>	<i><25</i>	<i>25-29</i>	<i>30-34</i>
married childless vs unmarried childless	13.36	9.65	2.20
unmarried dad vs. unmarried childless	24.52	8.78	-5.53
married dad vs. unmarried childless	15.99	1.80	0.01
black married dad	23.02		
age linear	12.05	23.65	29.18
age quad	-0.21	-0.37	-0.46
afqt linear	0.63	0.96	0.71
afqt quad	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
latino	55.67	9.94	12.31
white	54.84	16.16	33.89
	-		
lths	86.65	-82.58	-73.40
	-		
hsgd	65.43	-69.66	-59.46
	-		
some college	40.92	-67.24	-64.66
	-	-	-
intercept	38.22	167.43	265.94

Boldface indicates the estimate is significantly different from 0 at conventional levels