



**MOVEMBER®**

GLOBAL RESEARCH REPORT OF MALE SOCIAL CONNECTION

# **FATHERHOOD AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

RESEARCH BY IPSOS MORI  
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# FATHERHOOD AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Becoming a father is life changing. However, while it can be one of life's most rewarding experiences, until recently it hasn't been acknowledged how challenging that transition can be for new fathers, especially regarding their mental health.

It is thought that up to one in 10 new fathers experience depression after the birth of their baby<sup>1</sup>. And fathers with perinatal mental health problems are 47 times more likely to be considered at risk of suicide than at any other point in their lives<sup>2</sup>.

The quality of an individual's social connections has been proven to be a strong indicator of physical and mental wellbeing and longevity<sup>3</sup>, with mutually supportive friendships acting as a protective factor against anxiety and depression. Therefore, Movember believes that having and maintaining strong social connections will better serve fathers during this critical life stage, with this benefitting mothers, partners, children and society as a whole in addition.

## READER INFORMATION

In 2019, Movember commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct research about men's social connections, with a specific emphasis on fatherhood and the impact of becoming a father.

Ipsos MORI conducted online surveys with men aged 18 to 75 in four countries; UK, Australia, Canada and the USA. 1,000 men were surveyed in each country (4,000 in total, 42% of whom were fathers). Unless otherwise stated, this report uses combined data from all four countries. The survey was conducted across all countries in mid-May 2019. For more information about the methodology, please see the 'Technical Details' section at the end of this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Becoming a father can be a stressful experience.** Seven in ten (70%) fathers say that their stress levels increased in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time.
- **Becoming a father can be an isolating experience.** Almost a quarter (23%) of dads say they felt isolated when they first became a father.
- **Becoming a father can influence men's behaviours which negatively impacts their physical health.** Over half (56%) of dads say that they experienced at least

one negative health behaviour in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time.

- **Men are feeling pressured to be good fathers.** 67% of soon-to-be fathers, 53% of current fathers and 50% of all men say that men are under more pressure nowadays to be good fathers.
- **Having close friends is important for fathers' mental health.** Fathers without close friends are more likely to experience increased stress levels in the first 12 months of becoming a father (33% say their stress levels increased a lot compared with 23% of all men with at least one close friend).
- **The quality of friendships is also important.** Fathers who are dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships are more likely to experience increased stress levels after becoming a father, not handle this stress well, feel that no-one was looking out for them and feel isolated.
- **Some men lose friendships as they enter fatherhood.** A fifth (20%) of fathers say that the number of close friends they had decreased in the 12 months after becoming a father.
- **Men (and fathers) don't always recognise the importance of close friendships.** When asked to choose three very important aspects of their lives, less than a fifth of men (18%) say that having close friends is very important to them.
- **There is a sizeable group of men who say they are satisfied with their friendships yet who could not or would not talk to their friends about their problems.** Over half (51%) of men who could not or would not talk to their friends about their problems are satisfied with the quality of their friendships.
- **Men can find it difficult to talk about problems with their friends, such as mental health.** 18% of men (and 16% of fathers) say they could not, or would not, talk to a friend about problems they were finding it hard to cope with.
- **Satisfaction with friendships is lowest during middle years.** 43% of both 55+ year olds and 18-34 year olds say they are very satisfied with the quality of their friendships, compared with 34% of 35-54 year olds.
- **The pressures of being a father are more likely to affect young fathers.** They are more likely to say they felt isolated when first becoming a dad (40% of 18-35 year old fathers compared to 11% of 55+ year old fathers) and they are more likely to say their stress levels increased a lot in the first 12 months of becoming a father (29% vs. 17%).

<sup>1</sup> Eddy et al, 2019 (USA)

<sup>2</sup> Quevedo et al, 2011 (Brazil)

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>

## BECOMING A DAD CAN BE TOUGH

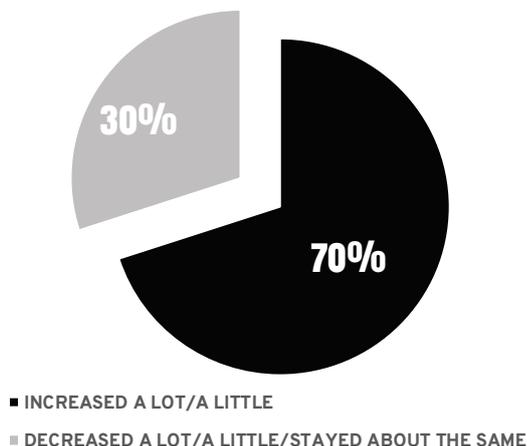
On balance, becoming a dad is seen positively. When asked how they felt in the 12 months after becoming a father, around two-thirds (63%) say 'happy', and over two-fifths say 'positive' (43%). However, there is a significant minority saying they felt 'overwhelmed' (29%), 'anxious' (28%), 'lonely' (8%) and 'depressed' (7%).

### Becoming a father can also be a stressful experience.

Seven in ten (70%) fathers say that their stress levels increased in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time, with a quarter (24%) saying their stress levels increased 'a lot'.

This increase in stress was predominantly linked to a lack of sleep (56% of fathers who experienced increased stress say this was a cause) and finances (50%). But fathers also felt stressed due to commitments and demands on their time (38% say work commitments were a cause, 35% say a lack of time to do their own things, and 33% say family commitments added to this increased stress).

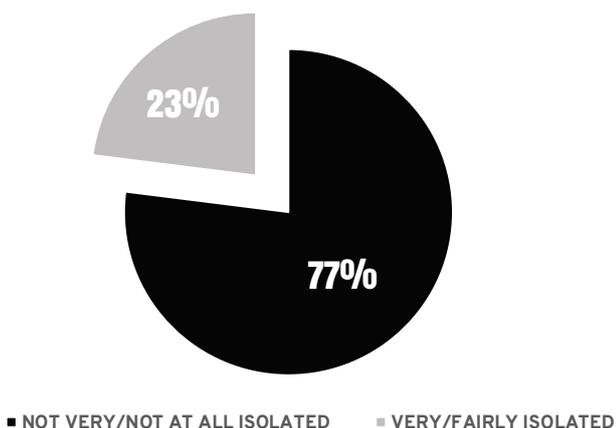
### B15: In the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time, would you say your stress levels...



Base: All fathers (excluding 'Don't know' responses): 1,566

Becoming a father can be an isolating experience and this is recognised by almost a quarter (23%) of dads who say they felt isolated when they first became a father. A similar proportion (19%) say there was no one looking out for them when they became a father for the first time.

### B19: When you became a father for the first time, how isolated, if at all, did you feel?



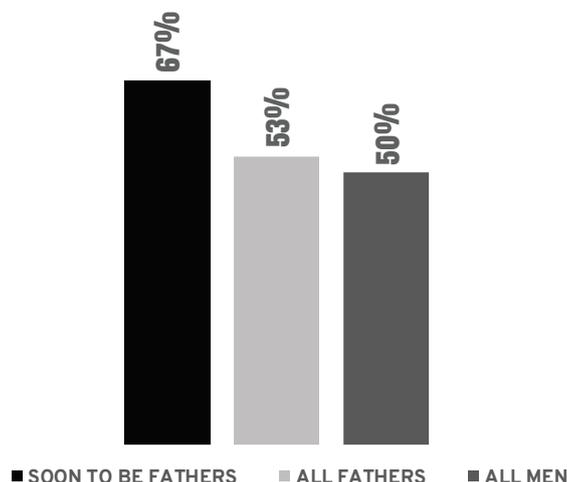
Base: All fathers (excluding 'Don't know' responses): 1,546

## MEN FEEL PRESSURE HAS INCREASED TO 'BE A GOOD DAD'

The research suggests that men are feeling more pressured than ever to be good fathers. Approximately two-thirds of soon-to-be fathers, whose babies are due in the next 6 months or so, say that men are under more pressure nowadays to be good fathers (67%, though note this is based on 61 individuals). Over half (53%) of current fathers and a similar proportion of all men (50%) say that men are under more pressure nowadays to be good fathers. A third of men (33%) say that there is about the same pressure nowadays, while only 4% say there is less pressure nowadays for men to be good fathers.

### B12: Would you say fathers are under more or less pressure to be a 'good father' nowadays, or is there no difference?

Say men are under more pressure to be a 'good father' nowadays



Base: Soon to be fathers: 61; All fathers: 1,635; All men: 4,000

These pressures may contribute to the anxiety felt by fathers and men with babies on the way. Nearly three-quarters of soon-to-be dads are anxious about being a good father (74%, though note this is based on 61 individuals). This anxiety seems to decrease once men have had children, though a sizable proportion of current fathers (over two-fifths; 42%) still say that they feel anxious about being a good father.

## LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN AFFECT MEN'S PHYSICAL (AND MENTAL) HEALTH

Becoming a father can influence men's behaviours and negatively impact their physical health as a consequence. Over half (56%) of dads say that they experienced at least one negative health behaviour in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time – most commonly doing less exercise (34%), but also putting on weight (23%), smoking more (12%), drinking more alcohol (10%), or all of these (6%). This is important given it has been shown that physical and mental health are closely interlinked, with

physical health problems significantly increasing the risk of poor mental health (and vice-versa)<sup>4</sup>.

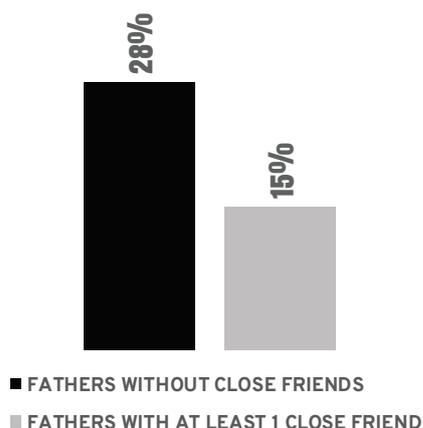
## KEEPING UP WITH FRIENDS HELPS

The research supports the idea that having close friends is important for fathers' mental health. For example, fathers without close friends are more likely to experience increased stress levels in the first 12 months of becoming a father. A third (33%) of dads without close friends say that their stress levels increased 'a lot', compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all men with at least one close friend.

Fathers without close friends report they felt less equipped at handling the increased stresses of fatherhood (28% of fathers without close friends say they did not handle their stress well compared with 15% of men with at least one close friend).

### B16: How well, if at all, do you think you handled this stress?

Handled stress levels 'not well' in the 12 months after becoming a father



Base: Men without close friends who were more stressed after becoming a father: 73; men with at least one close friend who were more stressed after becoming a father: 1,018

Unsurprisingly, fathers without any close friends are more likely to feel as though no-one was looking out for them when they became a father for the first time (40% of dads without close friends say this, compared with 18% of men with at least one close friend).

It isn't just *having* friends that can help dads to cope. The *quality* of these friendships is also important. Fathers who are dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships are more likely to:

- Experience increased stress levels in the first 12 months after becoming a father. 37% of fathers who are dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships say

their stress levels increased 'a lot', compared with 22% of those who are satisfied with their friendships.

- Say that they did not handle this stress well (28% of those dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships say they did not handle the increased stress well, compared with 14% of those satisfied with the quality of their friendships).
- Feel as though no-one was looking out for them when they became a father (33%, compared with 17% of those satisfied with the quality of their friendships).
- Feel isolated after they became a father (37%, compared with 21% of those satisfied with the quality of their friendships).
- Identify with negative descriptors of the first 12 months of becoming a father. For example, 50% of fathers who are dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships say they felt 'stressed' (compared with 29% of those who are satisfied), 43% say they were 'overwhelmed' (compared with 27%), 42% were 'anxious' (compared with 26%), 16% were 'lonely' (compared with 7%), and 14% were 'depressed' (compared with 6%).

"I have many acquaintances but a true friend is like family." (Australian survey participant, aged 65-70)

## MEN DON'T ALWAYS RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS

Though it seems having close friends can positively impact on men's mental health, men (and fathers) don't always recognise the importance of close friendships in life. When asked to choose three very important aspects of their lives, less than a fifth of men (18%) say that having close friends is very important to them, in line with having a sense of purpose (19%), and below being in good health (32%), being financially comfortable (28%) and having a loving partner (25%). Fathers place a greater emphasis on the importance of having a loving partner (29% vs. 22% of non-fathers), and being part of a close family group (20% vs. 14%), whilst non-fathers are marginally more likely to recognise the importance of close friends (20% vs. 17% of fathers).

## MEN (AND FATHERS) CAN LACK, LOSE, OR STRUGGLE TO MAKE FRIENDS

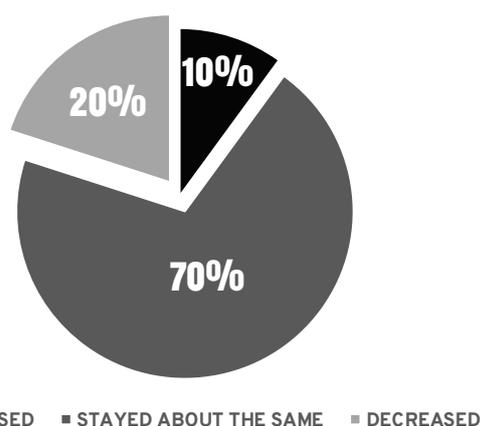
As discussed above, this research suggests that having close friendships, and those friendships being of high-quality, is important to the mental health of fathers. Yet this research also shows that fathers can lack social

connections that could benefit them, and additionally, some men lose friendships as they enter fatherhood.

A fifth (20%) of fathers say that the number of close friends they had decreased in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time (10% saw their friendship numbers increase whilst 70% saw no change). A much higher proportion of fathers who are dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships say that the number of close friends they had decreased in this period (45% compared with 16% of those satisfied with the quality of their friendships).

And some fathers (7%) don't have any close friends (this is also the case for 10% of non-fathers and 9% of all men).

**B14: In the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time, would you say the number of close friends you had...**



Base: All fathers (excluding 'Don't know' responses): 1,497

The majority of fathers can name at least one reason for not being in touch with their close friends as much as they would like (78%), and less than a quarter (22%) say they are in touch with their close friends as much as they would like, suggesting fathers would welcome greater contact with their close friends.

It's not only fathers – men in general can struggle to maintain friendships. Distance, growing apart and time pressures are the most common reasons cited by men for drifting away from friends. Over two-fifths (42%) of men who are not in touch with their close friends as much as they'd like say this is because they live too far away from their friends. Over a third (36%) say that they have grown apart from friends, and nearly three-in-ten (29%) say they haven't had time to maintain friendships. The results are very similar for fathers.

“I have small children and they take up most of my attention.” (Canadian survey participant, aged 50-55)

“Modern working life seems to drive a lot of enthusiasm out of people. It can leave many of us feeling more alone than we are.” (UK survey participant, aged 25-30)

When it comes to making new friends, awkwardness is an issue – three in ten (30%) of men who are open to making new friends say they are no good at making small talk, which has prevented them from making new friends, and the same proportion (30%) say they feel awkward about making new friends. A quarter (25%) say other things have been more important in their lives recently than making friends. As could be expected, fathers are more likely to say other things in their lives have been more important compared to non-fathers (29% vs. 22%), and that they haven't had time to make new friends (22% vs. 18%).

“Becoming a father has made it a little harder [to make new friends].” (Australian survey participant, aged 25-30)

Other reasons spontaneously given by survey participants for not maintaining friendships or making new ones include anxiety or depression limiting men's ability to reach out to others, and physical or health impairments. For some men, their close friends have died. For others, marriage and/or children have either taken up their own time or that of their close friends. Some men commented on it being hard to find new friends given a lack of 'like-minded' individuals or a shy/more introverted disposition, and in some instances a hesitancy to trust others. For a handful of men, a dislike of alcohol limits the opportunities they have to make new friends.

“People nowadays are too busy with their own lives and are not able to make new friends easily or they are not as interested as before.” (Canadian survey participant, aged 50-55)



## MEN CAN FIND IT DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT PERSONAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY MENTAL HEALTH

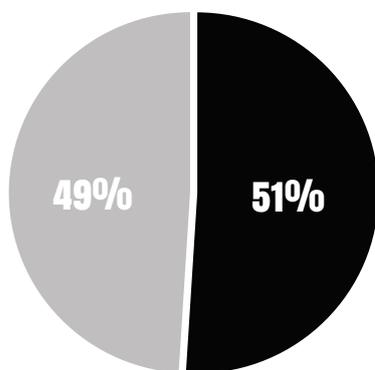
**Men can find it difficult to talk about personal problems with their friends.** In previous research Movember found that 70% of men say their friends can rely on them for emotional support, but only 48% say that they rely on their friends<sup>5</sup>, suggesting men feel they are there to support friends but do not always reach out when they themselves need help.

This research shows that 18% of men (and 16% of fathers) say they could not, or would not, talk to a friend about problems they were finding it hard to cope with.

**There is a sizeable group of men who say they are satisfied with their friendships yet who would not talk to their friends about their problems** – suggesting that even when men are happy with their friendships, some still cannot or prefer not to talk about problems they are facing. Over half (51%) of men who could not or would not talk to their friends about their problems still say that they are satisfied with the quality of their friendships. For this group of men, their friendships may not be acting as an outlet for them to get things off their chest.

### A2: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of friendships you have?

Among men who could not or would not talk to friends about their problems



■ VERY/FAIRLY SATISFIED   ■ VERY/FAIRLY DISSATISFIED / DON'T KNOW

*Base: All males aged 18-75 who could not or would not talk to friends about their problems: 714*

**Men say it is harder to talk about mental health than most other things (with the exception of sex).** 15% of men and 13% of fathers say mental health is the hardest topic for them to discuss with friends, more-so than finances (12%), marriage/relationships (8%), drink or drugs (4%), work/studies (4%), physical health (3%), family (3%) and children (2%). Sex is however the most difficult subject for men (and fathers) to discuss (37% and 32%).

## TO CONCLUDE

This research adds to the evidence which shows that the transition into fatherhood can be a stressful time for men which impacts on both physical and mental health and leaves some men feeling isolated. Having close friends, and good quality friendships, can act as a buffer to these stresses though there is some evidence to suggest that men can lose friends when they become fathers and that they are not in touch with mates as much as they'd like.

<sup>5</sup> <https://uk.movember.com/mens-health/general>



## THE EFFECT OF AGE

**Younger men place a greater importance on friendships.** They are more likely to have a greater number of friends they can talk to (38% of 18-34 year olds say there are several friends they could talk to about their problems compared to 27% of 35-54 year olds and 24% of 55+ year olds). And they place a greater importance on having close friends (with 21% of 18-34 year olds rating this as very important compared to 19% of 35-54 year olds and 15% of 55+ year olds).

**Older men are less open to change and are less likely to open up.** A third of men aged 55 and over (32%) say they are in touch with friends as much as they'd like (compared to 17% of 18-34 year olds and 21% 34-54 year olds). Older men are also less open to the possibility of making new friends with 28% of 55+ year olds saying they don't want to make new friends (compared to 12% of 18-34 year olds and 19% of 35-54 year olds). There is also a greater reticence among older men to talk about their problems with 12% of 55+ year olds saying they don't like to talk to friends about their problems (compared to 5% of 18-34 year olds and 8% of 35-54 year olds).

**Satisfaction with friendships is lowest during middle years.** Even though older men are the least likely to open up to mates about their problems, they are just as likely as young men to say they are satisfied with the quality of their friendships (with 43% of both 55+ year olds and 18-34 year olds saying they are very satisfied). Satisfaction with the quality of friendships appears to drop for men aged 35-54 with a smaller proportion saying they are very satisfied (34%) and a higher proportion saying they are dissatisfied (17% vs. 13% for 18-34 year olds and 10% for 55+ year olds).

**The pressures of being a father are more likely to affect young fathers, though they feel they are better equipped to cope.** A number of indicators suggest younger fathers are affected by the impact of fatherhood more so than older fathers. For example, they are more likely to say they felt isolated when first becoming a dad (40% of 18-35 year old fathers compared to 11% of 55+ year old fathers) and they are more likely to say their stress levels increased a lot in the first 12 months of becoming a father (29% vs. 17%). Younger fathers are also more likely to have had negative experiences of first becoming a dad with, for example, 13% of 18-34 year old fathers saying they felt lonely compared to 3% of 55+ year old fathers.

Younger fathers may also feel a greater pressure to be a good dad, with 66% of fathers aged 18-34 saying they feel anxious about being a good father (compared to 27% of 55+ year old fathers).

That said, younger fathers also appear to feel better equipped to cope with the increased stresses and pressures of becoming a dad. They are more likely to say they had many people looking out for them when they became a father (38% of 18-34 year olds vs. 23% of 55+ year olds), and they are more likely to say their number of friends increased after becoming a father (28% vs. 4%). These factors may well contribute to helping younger fathers better cope with the increased stresses of becoming a dad (with 36% of 18-34 year old dads experiencing increased stress saying they coped very well with it compared to 18% of fathers aged 55+).

It should be noted that whilst 'don't knows' have been excluded from the data shown for these questions to account for poorer recall of older fathers, men who first became a father many years ago may still have less accurate recall of their experiences at that time.

## DIFFERENCES BY NATIONALITY

**Australian men appear to find the transition into fatherhood the hardest.** The research suggests that Australian men experience greater difficulties when becoming a father, with American men (and to some extent Canadian men) faring better. There are a number of examples of this throughout the research. For example, Australian men are most likely to:

- Have felt isolated when they became a father (26% compared to 19% in the USA, 18% in Canada and 23% in the UK)
- Say they did not cope well with the stresses of becoming a father (23% compared to 10% in the USA, 13% in Canada and 16% in the UK)
- Say they felt lonely in the first 12 months after their baby was born (12% compared to 6% in the USA, 5% in Canada and 7% in the UK)
- Say their friendship numbers decreased when they became a dad (22% compared to 14% in the USA, 18% in Canada and 17% in the UK)
- Say fathers nowadays are under more pressure to be a good father (55% compared to 49% in the USA, 50% in Canada and 49% in the UK)

There are also some differences by nationality when considering what men view as the most important aspect of their lives. Men in the UK are more likely to say having a loving partner (23% vs. 18% in the USA, 19% in Australia and 20% in Canada), and American men are more likely to say having a sense of purpose in life (17% vs. 12% in Australia, 12% in Canada and 13% in the UK).

**American fathers are much more likely to have a clear direction on what it means to be a good father.** This is reflected by a higher proportion of American fathers agreeing they have a role model for being a good father (65% compared to 49% in Australia, 49% in the UK and 54% in Canada). And American fathers are more likely to agree they know what they need to do to be a good father (87% vs. 77% in Australia, 77% in the UK and 78% in Canada). There is also a stronger recognition among American fathers that spending time away from their child is important (63% vs. 52% in Australia, 56% in the UK and 56% in Canada).

**American men appear most satisfied with their friendships.** American men are the most likely to say they are very satisfied with the quality of their friendships (45% compared to 35% in Australia, 39% in the UK and 39% in Canada). American men are also more likely to claim they have several friends they could talk to about their problems (34% compared to 27% in Australia, 28% in the UK and 28% in Canada). Though subtle, there do appear to be differences between nationalities in how hard mental health is as a subject to talk about. American men are the least likely to name mental health as the hardest subject to discuss with friends (13% compared to 18% in Australia, 16% in the UK and 14% in Canada).

**There are some differences between nationalities in the reasons for losing touch with friends or not making new ones.** For UK and Australian men in particular, embarrassment and awkwardness play a greater role. For example, men from the UK and Australia (who are open to making new friends) are more likely to say they feel awkward about it (33% for both countries compared to 26% in America and 27% in Canada) and they are not good at small talk (33% in the UK and 34% in Australia compared to 26% in America and 27% in Canada). Men of these two nationalities are also more likely to say they are not good at responding to friends or arranging to meet up (22%/23% vs. 14% in America and 19% in Canada). For American men, the greatest barrier to keeping in touch with friends is distance with 45% saying they live too far away (compared to 38% in Australia, 41% in the UK and 42% in Canada).

The research also suggests that men of different nationalities respond differently to becoming a father for the first time. On balance, Canadian fathers are the most likely to name positive descriptors such as 'happy' (86% naming at least one positive descriptor vs. 79% in the UK, 79% in Australia and 83% in the USA), whilst Australian fathers are the most likely to name negative descriptors such as 'lonely' (60% naming at least one negative descriptor vs. 52% in the UK, 53% in Canada and 56% in the USA).

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Ipsos MORI conducted a quota survey online in the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA, with members of Ipsos Interactive Services online panels.

1,000 males aged 18-75 within each country completed the survey (within the UK only, 6 participants identified their gender as 'in another way').

Response quotas were set for each country based on age, region and working status and the final data were weighted to reflect these profiles. These quotas were based on the latest and most relevant census information available for each country.

Fieldwork dates:

- UK: 7 - 14th May 2019
- USA: 9 - 15th May 2019
- Canada: 9 - 15th May 2019
- Australia: 10 - 14th May 2019

Unless otherwise stated, survey data is based on combined responses across the four countries.

The sample sizes for statistics mentioned in this report are as follows:

- 1,635 fathers/ 2,279 non-fathers (excluding individuals due to become a father in the next 6 months)
- 361 men without any close friends/ 3,524 men with at least 1 close friend
- 3,320 men satisfied with the quality of their friendships/ 531 dissatisfied
- 3,072 men not in touch with friends as much as they'd like/ 3,203 men open to making new friends
- 1,244 18-34 year olds/ 1,465 35-54 year olds/ 1,291 55+ year olds
- 412 UK fathers/ 436 Australian fathers/ 381 American fathers/ 406 Canadian fathers

For some questions, figures have been re-based to exclude 'Don't know' responses.

Significance testing has been applied to the data, with all figures reported being statistically significant to the 5% level.

