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News release

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Government policy bad for dads

Fathers' lack of involvement in parenting is the biggest obstacle to post-divorce child custody, according to a new Australia Institute report, *Fatherhood and Fatherlessness*, released today.

"Fathers are highly involved in day-to-day care of children in only ten per cent of families. That's the real reason that more fathers don't get custody of their kids after separation and divorce. Many men want to do more fathering. But they're hindered by economic, policy and cultural obstacles," said Dr Michael Flood, author of the Australia Institute report.

"The most important obstacle to fathers' parenting after separation is not the Family Court, nor selfish mothers, but many fathers' own lack of involvement in parenting before divorce. When couples separate, most fathers have not been involved with mothers in shared parenting, and mothers continue to be the primary carers after separation."

"If the Government wants men to be involved parents after divorce, it should encourage them to spend more time with their children before divorce," said Dr Michael Flood.

The Howard Government is considering rewriting family law to include a 'rebuttable presumption of joint custody' following family breakdown. The Family Court would assume that children will physically reside with both separated parents for equal periods, living one week with the mother and the next with the father for example, unless there were good reasons to do otherwise.

"This will only affect the five per cent of divorcing couples with children who can't agree on parenting arrangements and whose cases are decided in the Family Court," said Dr Michael Flood.

"While the stated objective of these changes is to improve family outcomes, in fact they could make things worse. They would reduce the flexibility families need to develop parenting arrangements which best fit their children. And they would potentially expose women, children and men to higher levels of conflict and violence," said Dr Michael Flood.

"Men can benefit as much as women from family-friendly workplaces, especially if they want to connect with their kids."

"Australian fathers need policies that help them connect with their children at all stages of life, not simplistic laws that fail to address the real obstacles to involved fathering", Dr Flood concluded.