**Boys with absent fathers more likely to be young fathers**

Boys with absent fathers are more likely to hit puberty later, but become fathers earlier according to research from LSE.

According to a study published in the Royal Society Journal Biology Letters, boys with absent fathers were more likely to go onto have at least one child by the age of 23.

Boys who lost their fathers before the age of seven were particularly affected, being nearly seven per cent more likely to become young fathers.

In addition, the absence of a father specifically in adolescence – between the ages of 11 and 16 – made it more likely that there would be a delay in a boy's voice-breaking – a proxy of puberty.

Paula Sheppard, a researcher at LSE and one of the paper's authors said: "Our research suggests that it's not just the absence of a father that can affect when a boy experiences puberty and becomes a father, but also the timing of that absence.

"It's particularly surprising to see that a boy's puberty can be delayed as a result of events that happen in adolescence.

We've previously assumed that these things are 'locked-in' in early childhood."

This research contrasts with well-documented evidence on girls with absent fathers, who tend to experience puberty and become sexually active earlier.

However, similarly to boys with no fathers, they have children earlier.

Paula Sheppard said: "We didn't look at why boys are affected in these ways.

We can speculate that the stress of losing a father could perhaps delay puberty.

Those boys that become young fathers may have inherited noncommittal, promiscuous behaviour from their absent fathers.

Or it may be that fathers, when they are present, influence their sons to stay in education and so delay starting a family.

But this goes beyond our research."

Factors such as birth-weight, social class, and being breastfed for less than one month, were taken account of to establish that it really was the father's absence that mattered rather than other adverse conditions in early life.

The researchers undertook their study by analysing data from the UK National Child Development Study –  an ongoing survey of around 9500 British children born in the first week of March 1958.

This provides information on social and economic, health and family circumstances over time

The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.