

**Exploring Urban Fathers' Involvement for Children's Socio-Emotional  
Development in the Early Years: A Fathers' Perception Study**

By

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A thesis submitted to BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

BRAC Institute of Educational Development  
BRAC University  
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It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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of **Spring 2022** has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of **Master of Science in Early Childhood Development** on **January 2024**.

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## Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: \_\_\_\_\_ **“Exploring Urban Fathers’ Involvement for Children's Socio-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Fathers’ Perception Study”** \_\_\_\_\_

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Suhany Zaimah

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1. Source of population

\_\_\_\_\_ Dhaka city residents \_\_\_\_\_

2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects (No)
- b) Social risk (No)
- c) Psychological risk to subjects (No)
- d) discomfort to subjects (No)
- e) Invasion of privacy (No)

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study (Yes)
- b) Procedures to be followed (Yes)
- c) Physical risk (N/A)
- d) Sensitive questions (Yes)
- e) Benefits to be derived (Yes)
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study (Yes)
- g) Confidential handling of data (Yes)
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved (N/A)

4. Will Signed verbal consent for be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants (Yes)
- b) from parents or guardian (Yes)
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect anonymity of subjects? (Yes)

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

- a) Proposal
- b) Consent Form
- c) Questionnaire or interview schedule

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## **Abstract**

Fatherhood is a critical component in the construction of male identities all over the world. Men experience this complex and constantly evolving socio-cultural construction in their own ways through their unique upbringing and exposure to diverse life experiences within their socio-cultural environment. This study attempts to explore the perceptions of current generation of urban fathers to capture aspects of their involvement for their children's socio-emotional development in the early years. This exploration is based on a qualitative study among a group of 7 fathers currently residing in urban Dhaka, Bangladesh. Results show tremendous influence of practices from previous generations resulting in the mindfulness and active involvement in how differently fathers currently engage with their children while channeling their unique individual influences from previous generations. Fathers share their dedication to daily engagement practices, their life experiences and the environmental factors shaping their child-rearing beliefs and practices in their efforts to support the socio-emotional development of their children within the Bangladeshi context.

**Keywords:** fathers' involvement, socio-emotional development, urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

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## **List of Acronyms**

ECD	Early Childhood Development
IDI	In-depth Interview
ELDS	Early Learning Development Standards

## **Chapter I: Introduction & Background**

*“More than just a second parent or an extra set of hands, fathers are one of the best child development resources we have, and if we are going to give children the best start in life, we all need to fully recognize and utilize this role”*

- Dr. Pia Britto, UNICEF Chief of Early Childhood Development

### **Introduction**

By providing love and protection, engaging in play, and supporting proper nutrition, a father can nurture their children from the earliest years to bolster their children’s learning, reduce behavioral issues and promote a happier and healthier transition into adulthood. The role of parents, or rather the role of mothers and fathers as individuals in children’s lives, is what shapes their lives. However, the effectiveness of each of these roles individually as mothers and fathers, also has the power to completely alter their children’s lives. Historically, mothers have borne the role of the nurturer and caregiver whereas the father has played the role of the provider. As the effects of this cycle continued to pass down generations, the role of fathers has diversified particularly in urban areas due to contributing factors such as increasing education levels and increasing participation of women in the labor force impacting the composition of families and gender responsibilities (Bhamani, 2012).

According to the Zero to Three Foundation (2016), a child’s overall and long-term healthy development is deeply affected by the relationship between the father and child. A father’s active involvement in his child’s life can positively influence the child’s success in school and career, practicing independence, as well as managing emotions. Mothers provide a more natural comfort and connection to their children starting from before their birth but fathers also play an essential role in the primary brain development within the first thousand days of their child’s life with their support in providing a secure and nurturing environment.



In the security of such a nurturing and stimulating environment, the neural connections formed rapidly in the early years are enabled to develop at an optimal speed and can establish a child's cognitive ability in conjunction with their health, happiness, learning, thinking, and ability to deal with stress as well as form relationships (UNICEF, 2018). However, there is not nearly enough evidence sharing factors which strengthen fathers in their role of promoting children's overall wellbeing (Murshid, 2016).

In settings with low-resources, existing evidence of fathers' involvement is mostly available based on maternal reports sharing fathers' direct engagement with children which are often limited to reading to the child. However, there is growing evidence that fathers are also able to potentially influence their children's development indirectly by supporting maternal mental health and wellbeing through positive involvement with the mother by offering interpersonal support or sharing decision-making responsibilities (Garcia et al, 2022).

It is both the concepts of "fatherhood," defined as the social and symbolic status granted to fathers, as well as "fathering," the activities carried out by fathers through engaging with their children, which have mostly been formally conceptualized through Western standards (Ball & Wahedi, 2010). Historically, the theories, research, and program models have examined fathers' engagement for the wellbeing of children based on North American studies (Lamb, 2010, as cited in Hossan & Atencio, 2017). In today's diverse world, it is becoming even more important to study child development from a multicultural perspective because of the wide-ranging cultural variations in the ways children think, learn, play, interact and communicate (Trawick-Smith, pg.15, 2018).

Taking multiple factors into consideration, those early perspectives would not convey an accurate understanding of the progress and challenges of fatherhood and fathering in the context of Bangladeshi culture. The last few decades have redefined aspects of family life in

Bangladesh through benefits of urbanization and economic growth (Ball & Wahedi, 2010) as well as developing problems such as corruption, increasing divorce rates and pressures from poverty which are often factors that influence parenting roles in both urban and rural families (Hossain & Atencio, 2017). To understand the progress of Bangladeshi fathers' contributions to the wellbeing of their children, this research followed a qualitative approach to explore current perceptions of urban fathers and their involvement for the socio-emotional development of their children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Children with uninvolved fathers during their critical early years may experience a lack of positive social skills, cognitive abilities as well as overall satisfaction with life (Palkovitz, 2002). During these early years, when children's brains are quickly developing, so is their capacity to form close relationships with other children and adults. Within the earliest few years, children attain social and emotional skills such as regulating their emotions and sharing with others, through nurturing and responsive care from parents and caregivers (Palmer, 2019). Even with mothers' involvement or the support of household financial resources, fathers' active participation in child-related activities such as playing, reading, bathing, can significantly impact their children's cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional development throughout the early years (McMunn et al, 2017). The effects of a father's role in a child's life are of such unique importance, that even when fathers are relatively uninvolved, their characteristics still have an impact on their children (Pleck, 1997).

It is common for families in Bangladesh to have access to additional help with raising children whether it is through extended family members or paid help. While this may help provide a loving and nurturing environment for the child, it is not interchangeable with a father's love and care for a child in their early years. The addition of extra help may prove to be beneficial for the child but it cannot replace the lifelong benefits from a child's secure

attachment with their father. While fathers may be more involved in their children's lives than previous generations of fathers, evidence suggests that women remain largely responsible for child care and domestic life in Bangladesh (Doucet, 2013, as cited by McMunn et al, 2017). Traditionally, mothers bear the responsibilities of fulfilling children's everyday necessities and providing all other support for the children including physical and mental support whereas fathers provide financial support for the children and mothers (Naomee, 2013). Due to the traditional patriarchal system in this part of the world, it has been more common for mothers to manage the children's education, basic needs, and overall household decisions but important overarching decisions concerning the whole family would be taken by the head of the family- the father (Naomee, 2013). There have been exceptions, of course, where fathers were more directly involved with the feeding, dressing, studying, etc. with their children and have now become more common among fathers of younger generations who have brought about a shift in the culture of being more consciously involved in their children's early years (Sabur, 2019).

### **Purpose of the study**

As found by Ball and Wahadi (2010), fatherhood is a critical component in the construction of the Bangladeshi male identity. The benefits of fatherhood not only have lifelong impacts on the children's development but positively impact the father's wellbeing as well. Despite this knowledge, there is limited research investigating the factors within the Bangladeshi context promoting fathers' involvement for the socio-emotional development of children in the early years. According to Trawick-Smith (pg.14, 2018) parental socialization practices and principles vary notably across cultures. To support expanding interventions for children's development in Bangladesh, it is important to illuminate fathers' perceptions to deepen the understanding, appreciation and sensitivity to the variations in how they interact with children. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of urban fathers, their involvement practices and the factors shaping their child-rearing practices to support the

socio-emotional development of their children in the early years within the Bangladeshi context.

### **Significance of the study**

The lifelong potential of children's positive outcomes influenced by increased fathers' involvement can only serve as a positive outcome for communities in Bangladesh. Fathers are a core component in children's development and upbringing and therefore exploring the everyday contexts and events of fathering are critical to achieve new levels of understanding and analysis (Marsiglio et al, 2005) to support working with Bangladeshi fathers for children's outcomes.

When fathers actively participate in the upbringing, education and social lives of their children, children are more equipped to manage their emotions and be more open-minded (UNICEF, 2023). Fathers engaging in reading activities with pre-schoolers results in them having stronger verbal skills; girls with secure relationships with fathers obtain stronger math skills and boys with highly involved fathers in their life achieve higher grades and perform at advanced levels (Sparks, 2018). Such evidence supports the need for developing interventions in Bangladesh to strengthen fathers' involvement for improving children's educational outcomes and working towards achieving 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4: *Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

In comparison, lack of fathers' engagement holds twice the number of chances for children repeating a grade or dropping out of school (NRFC, 2023). Due to leading research on child socio-emotional development being focused on Western societies, there is a growing need to expand the research across societies (Cui et al, 2018), especially for cultures in the global south. Research exploring fathers' involvement for child care is notably limited in developing countries (Jesmin & Seward, 2011). Cross-cultural research can help expand

understanding of child-rearing practices and share further insights into father-child dynamics to support, counter or expand international research because even with differences in socialization across cultures, parents share the ultimate goal for rearing productive, successful and happy children for their culture (Cui et al, 2018). Bhamani (2012) emphasizes the significant need for sharing perceptions of diverse fathers to include culturally authentic and contextually appropriate perspectives to structure studies with larger samples of fathers from developing countries.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are urban fathers' understanding of their engagement and its effect on children's socio-emotional development in the early years?
2. What are the child-rearing practices of urban fathers in supporting children's socio-emotional development in the early years?
3. What are the factors which shape the urban fathers' child-rearing practices for supporting children's socio-emotional development in the early years?

## **Operational Definitions**

**Socio-emotional development:** Along with children's physical, cognitive and linguistic domains rapidly developing in their brains in the first few years, another critical area of development is the socio-emotional domain. The capacity to acquire foundational social and emotional skills is often also referred to as early childhood mental health and encompasses children's capacity to "experience, regulate and express a range of emotions, develop close and secure relationships with other children and adults, as well as actively explore their environment and learn" (Palmer, 2019). Children's socialization and emotional development are interconnected with their learning and nearly impossible to separate as soon as children begin engaging right after birth (ELDS, 2010, pg.31). Social development consists

of securing the abilities to interact with adults and peers, accepting diversity and establishing friendships in conjunction with acquiring the development of self-concept, self-control and emotional expression (ELDS, 2010, pg.10). A child's social interactions depict how they view themselves and the environment. Responsive and nurturing caregiving is essential for children's healthy development of the interdependence between social and emotional wellbeing.

**Father involvement:** Defined as “men’s positive, wide-ranging, and active participation in their children’s lives” (Fogarty & Evans, 2009). Father’s involvement can also be defined in many more ways such as a father’s direct interaction with their child through play or caretaking; accessibility and/or availability in response to child’s needs; bearing responsibility and/or managing provisions for the child (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Marsiglio, 2006). While engaging through play and daily activities in their children’s lives, other involvement may also include actively participating in school and social activities to have a more active presence building a network and community. Besides direct interaction with the children, father’s may also indirectly influence their children’s development through a greater involvement with the mother by offering interpersonal support or sharing decision-making responsibilities, ultimately benefiting the child. (Garcia et al, 2022).

**Early years:** The Zero to Three Foundation (2023) defines the “early years” as the time between birth and age three when a child’s brain develops at the speed of one million neural connections per second. With the sensory pathways such as hearing, language, and higher cognitive function all peaking by the first three years of life (Zero to Three, 2023), this early period of children’s lives also happens to be the most important time for laying the foundation of their lifelong mental health and wellbeing.

**Perception:** Originating from the word “comprehension,” Collins Dictionary (2005) defines perception as “the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the

mind; cognition; understanding. Perception is how a concept is being understood, interpreted and conceptualized through experiences and awareness. Therefore, perception studies are research conducted to understand opinions and motivations of a target audience.

**Urban:** Term for defining the demography with trends of a city with high density population and largely developed infrastructure with advanced features

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

There has been a growing interest in the critical role of fathers emphasizing that most child development studies primarily focus on mothers and children before including fathers into parenting interventions or examining fathers' multidimensional role for children's development (Cowan et al, 2005, as cited by Bhamin, 2012). Various research studies explore the positive association between fathers' involvement and children's optimal development in the early years (Perry et al, 2012, as cited by Bhamin, 2012). A long-established conceptualization of fathers' involvement theorizes the three components of fathers' involvement as 1) fathers' engagement as the direct interaction through caregiving, playing, leisure 2) accessibility as the father's availability and 3) responsibility for providing resources and ensuring the child is taken care of (McMunn et al, 2017). The concept was further refined to include engagement to emphasize on positive engagement which consists of activities promoting child development, characterized between "routine" child care and more "developmental" teaching and playing activities (Martin et al, 2017).

### ***Father's involvement in child development***

Fathers hold a crucial stake in the maternal health of mothers which can both indirectly and directly affect the child. Direct pathways are defined by father's positive interactions to engage with the child whereas indirect pathways refer to practices within the household which indirectly affects the child, such as influencing the mother's mental wellbeing or being physically available to the child (Garcia et al, 2022). Research studies measuring indirect pathways included more complex factors exploring positive support or negative conflict between spouses, provision of material and social needs for the family, or helping with housework (Garcia et al, 2022). Fathers' active involvement providing support for mother's maternal wellbeing can have an influence on child health care (Murshid, 2016). In South Asia where maternal and newborn child health (MNCH) services utilization rates are already low,



one path for achieving optimal MNCH outcomes might be through structural-level interventions centered on women, combined with components targeting male partners or male heads of households (Shaw et al, 2023). Studies show that husbands accompanying women when receiving health services is positively correlated with women's use of skilled MNH services as well as effectively increasing men's awareness regarding MNH issues (Rahman, 2018).

Fathers' relationship with their children are unique than the mother-child relationship because of fathers' general encouragement of their children to be competitive and independent due to the playful and physically stimulating nature of their interactions also contribute to why fathers are especially influential for the development of some qualities of child behavior (Flouri, 2007). According to Amato, (1994) as cited by Flouri (2007), children's closeness to father's during childhood showed positive relationships for both sons' and daughters' psychological regulation and wellbeing in adulthood even with maintaining closeness with mothers.

### ***Father's involvement for socio-emotional development***

Cui et al, (2018) references Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory's larger context in which the role of parents has been set in the child's microsystem, to support the argument that it is through the child's interactions with parents and caregivers, that they learn how to control their behavior and the self-regulation of emotions. Cui et al, (2018) further elaborates on the association between caregiver-infant interactions and its influence on neural networks for children's socio-emotional development where developmental changes in the offspring's brain microstructure are linked with child and adult behaviors.

The Zero to Three Foundation (2016) shares that children who grow up to be more confident and engage in deeper social connections with other children, are also those who had fathers that actively engaged in the daily activities such as feeding, bathing and playing

together. Furthermore, the rough-and-tumble variety of play that fathers engage in with young children helps regulate their feelings and behavior while teaching children how to manage aggressive impulses and physical contact in more socially acceptable ways.

Research evidence shared by Bhamani (2012) reports that children with involved fathers possess higher self-regulation, lower coping and competence issues, self-management and behavioral problems. Additionally, these children handle stress better, easily adjust to new situations and are more resilient (Veneziano, 2000 as cited by Bhamani, 2012). Children whose fathers were more engaged in their early years established more positive relationships with peers, were more sociably liked by others, enjoyed team building and actively participating in social events (Kato et al, 2002, as cited by Bhamani, 2012).

### ***Global context***

Similar to any other social identity, men's experience of fatherhood varies in different contexts due to its complex, socio-cultural element and constantly evolving nature in response to socio-economic and cultural changes (Sabur, 2019). The role of fathers globally has been through various phases of transition during 1970s and 1990s but complete demographic and socioeconomic transformations in the second half of the twentieth century brought about a significant change for men's roles in the family (Daly, 1995 as cited by Sabur, 2019). The emergence of "new fatherhood" brought with it the growing expectation for men's increased involvement in the family as gender ideologies began to shift and women with young children began joining the labor force, divorce rates started rising and geographic mobility due to globalization also increased (Sabur, 2019). Furthermore, Sabur (2019) referenced Dermott (2008) to argue that current ideals of fatherhood no longer hold the roles of being a disciplinarian, educator of moral authority as central elements anymore, but rather have replaced those roles by prioritizing nurturing elements of parental care through positive

engagement by participating in playful activities with their children and daily tasks for child care.

Fathers in the United States today spend more time with their children than previous generations from early 20<sup>th</sup> century and are most likely to hold more responsibility for teaching their children new concepts, engaging through bedtime duties and waking up at night to take the child back to bed (Jesmin & Seward, 2011). Whereas fathers were previously expected to primarily bear the role as the economic provider and authoritarian moral teacher, fathers in recent times are now also expected to engage in more physical and nurturing care for their children as an equal parent to the mother (Sabur, 2019).

### ***Bangladesh context***

Bangladesh is described as an agricultural society with about 66% of its 169 million population reside in villages and with a 2.1% birth rate in 2016, the average family was reported to have been significantly smaller than its size three decades ago (Hossain, 2018). A handful of studies investigating Bangladeshi families share the role of ideal fathers' primary role is of a breadwinner and protector of the family in contrast to the mother's primary roles as nurturer, caregiver and companion (Jesmin & Seward, 2011). Socioeconomic factors such as fathers' income, education, hours worked weekly outside of the home are considered to be significant predictors for fathers' involvement with their children (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004, as cited by Jesmin & Seward, 2011).

Father and mother roles in Bangladesh are grounded in traditional beliefs towards masculine and feminine gender roles where a woman experiences a sense of fulfillment and reassurance of her gender identity by becoming a mother and further carrying out the gendered division of child care (Coltrane, 1989 as cited by Jesmin & Seward, 2011). Whereas maternal employment was once not the traditional pattern in Bangladesh, tremendous globalization, changes in family patterns, work and gender roles have changed drastically

since 1990s (Sabur, 2019). Women's increasing participation in the labor market, increased literacy rates, and fulfilling professional, technical and managerial capacities in urban Dhaka have transformed their position in household decision-making and thus contributing to the more liberal attitude towards marriage and more equal gender roles within the family (Sabur, 2019).

### ***Role of Culture and Traditions***

To explore parenting approaches, it is first important to understand the historical context and how the ways that parents interact with their children are rooted in their cultural traditions.

Trawick-Smith (pg. 12, 2018) shares one of the characteristics of families who are more collective in their thinking and action tend to live in extended families, including parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and often practice merging resources and sharing caregiving responsibilities resulting in children growing up with a strong attachment to family and culture. Hossain (2018) explains the three major configurations of family systems in Bangladesh to be joint, extended and nuclear. While the traditional joint family system remains the core context for socialization, it is essentially three or more generations sharing the same living compound and pooling economic resources together whereas the extended family includes multiple nuclear families residing in the same household but not necessarily eating or pooling resources together. Due to their collectivism and preference for maintaining group well-being over individualism, nuclear families are still closely connected in sharing resources and responsibilities amongst themselves (Hossain, 2018).

Trawick-Smith (pg.12, 2018) emphasizes the importance of appreciating diversity to understand that due to many factors such as culture, socioeconomic status, gender, etc. resulting in the variation of behaviors and characteristics of people, children are not deficient or at risk because they develop following unique ways or display alternative practices of interacting with the world.



## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Research Participants**

All participants of this research study were fathers based in Dhaka, Bangladesh within the middle-income areas of Dhanmondi-Mohammadpur. Almost all of the fathers are the earning members in their families as well as either living with their own parents or within close distance to them. One of the participants spent the early years of their first born living abroad in Australia before moving back to Bangladesh for help with raising their two younger children who are both under the age of three. This participant's first born also happens to have special needs which provided a unique perspective for the study. Other unique perspectives included one participant who lost their father before the age of ten and another participant who spent their early years being raised by a single father with whom he also had a particularly challenging relationship. Majority of the participants knew their partners well before getting married while a few others either knew their partners for a brief period or had an arranged marriage. All of the participants were raised in middle-income families and have completed the same level of Bachelors education with some of them having completed higher education either abroad or in Bangladesh.

### **Research Site**

There were mixed settings for this study. Most of the in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted in-person with the participants with the exception of one IDI which was conducted online through the Google Meet platform for the convenience of the participant. The in-person interviews were conducted at a common place where the fathers come together to unwind and spend their free time. This location was selected for its convenience of time for the fathers but more importantly to allow the fathers to feel comfortable sharing their information. The

responses and recordings from the IDIs from all settings served as supporting evidence to better understand the fathers' perceptions.

## **Research Approach**

Whether through observation or reflections from personal experiences, it is well-understood that children change in many ways as they grow older. Although many of these changes can be both qualitative and quantitative, Trawick-Smith (2018) shares that as children acquire more knowledge, social ability, or physical proficiency with age, it is their thinking and behavior that emerge qualitatively different over time. Children gradually transform into unique individuals as they grow through all areas of development. Trawick-Smith (2018) explains that through each stage, parents' expectations of their children, how they interact with them, engage with them and how they support their children's social and emotional needs are all influenced by knowledge of such qualitative changes in children's development. According to Bhamani (2012), Western researchers have conducted expansive quantitative studies for examining the impact of the father's involvement on the optimal development of young children but more qualitative studies have been conducted for understanding the lived experiences, perceptions and beliefs of fathers.

Therefore, the approach for this research is a qualitative study to perform exploratory research to understand the parenting practices of fathers, their relationship with their children and their beliefs around fatherhood to understand the qualitative changes in their children's development through their engagement activities and the socio-emotional outcomes fathers want to instill in their children. Furthermore, the study explored the motivations and experiences of fathers and how their perceptions of fathering have changed upon becoming entering fatherhood. The data collected through a qualitative approach allowed the opportunity to capture an understanding of qualitative changes including factors and motivations of Bangladeshi urban fathers for their involvement in their children's lives.

## **Participants Selection Procedure**

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling was used to choose seven participants based in the middle-income areas of Dhanmondi-Mohammadpur areas of Dhaka city. The researcher purposely selected the participants based on convenience and using their sound judgement. Furthermore, participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Married fathers currently residing together with family
- Middle-socioeconomic group
- Raised by Bangladeshi parents
- Within 25-45 age range
- Raising at least one child within the pre-primary age group (0-4 years)

## **Data Collection Method and Procedure**

The in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted individually in-person with the participants to collect their responses. A semi-structured guideline exploring the fathers' motivations and understanding were used to facilitate the interviewing process and collect information of their perceptions and practices. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded through a recording device for verification purposes of the study.

## **Data Collection Tool**

A semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix A) was prepared to be used as a guideline for collecting data from the in-depth interviews with father participants. The guideline collected background information ranging from participant's name, age, educational qualification, occupation and details regarding the number of children, their age and gender. The guideline was divided into three sections: (A) understanding of socio-emotional development in the early years, (B) father's child-rearing practices to support children's socio-emotional



development and (C) factors shaping urban fathers' child-rearing practices for supporting children's socio-emotional development.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

Once the data was collected from the IDIs, the responses were cross-referenced with the notes taken during the interviews to account for any missing information. The responses were first transcribed in Bangla followed by English. While reading through the data collected from the interviews, the researcher coded the data by identifying key descriptive terms, events or actions to summarize key points and familiarize with the data collected from the participants. Further content analysis of the responses was done to gather commonalities amongst the responses and participant practices. Organizing the coding was used for thematic analysis to identify emerging themes and patterns corresponding directly with the research questions. The responses, notes and transcriptions were stored in individualized folders designated for data collection.

### **Validity & Reliability**

The research tool prepared followed a validation process prior to meeting with study participants. The interview guideline prepared by the researcher was shared with the subject matter experts at BRAC IED for approval and content validation. Pilot testing with the prepared guideline was conducted for face validity to assess its clarity and suitability. With minor adjustments made to the guideline, interviews were conducted with participants.

### **Ethical Issues**

The research study was performed by following strict ethical principles all throughout. Upon approval from BRAC IED, BRAC University's ethical committee, the ethical guideline was shared with participants. Participants were ensured that their participation was voluntary and they reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any point. A background brief of the

research was shared with the participants to help them understand the objectives and all questions were answered to the participants' satisfaction. Prior to starting, participants were made aware that the interviews were being recorded for verification purposes of the study. Participants' dignity, respect and confidentiality were maintained at all times.

## **Chapter IV: Results/Findings**

Most of the fathers expressed a positive understanding of social and emotional development for children in the early years. Although some of the fathers did not directly discuss the role of their involvement for their children's social and emotional development, the activities that they directly engage in with their children expressed their efforts for nurturing positive socio-emotional interactions and habits. Most of the fathers reported either living with the children's grandparents or having close ties with the grandparents resulting in mostly positive but also some challenges in their active participation with raising the children. All fathers showed a desire for an active presence in their children's daily lives and most of them shared several factors throughout their lives which have shaped their understanding as well as influenced their fatherhood practices.

### **Key Findings**

#### **1) General understanding of social and emotional development**

All of the fathers shared a positive view of the importance of social and emotional development for children and how parents, relatives, grandparents, and human interactions are very important. However, only two of the fathers shared a technical understanding of the importance of socio-emotional development for children in the early years and the role that parents and the adults play in supporting that development. One participant shared:

*If we think of it together, then social and emotional development for children is that as they are growing up, it's how they manage different relationships, how they learn and pickup cues to express what they are feeling- like jealousy or needing love from the parents. When they see others, it's how they perceive those interactions. I think socio-emotional development is closely related to the relationships within their environment*

*that the child bonds through, learns from and trains themselves for how to interact.*

(IDI #3, 3.12.23)

### **1.1 Fathers' involvement and activities**

Some of the fathers see “involvement” as being present and participating in the daily activities but mostly shared a variation of playing the role as a provider and what that participation looks like in their household. They shared how their involvement was mostly prioritized by where their support was needed more with child care:

*The mother holds the closest relationship, and then the grandparents, father is of course there but from my experience fathers have a lot more involvement abroad than they do here in Bangladesh. The amount of time I got to spend with my children when we were in Australia vs the amount I am getting to spend with them now in Bangladesh is very different. That gap in the father's involvement actually gets filled when there are grandparents available, cousins, other family members or even the domestic help. As a father I will do other things and concentrate on providing more support elsewhere. Not that those activities are not important but more so that those needs are already being addressed. (IDI #3, 3.12.23)*

When asked to elaborate on how his involvement was different in Australia compared to now, the father shared:

*Before moving to Bangladesh, there were several activities that I was directly involved in. I would make breakfast, drop them off at childcare, drop-off at school, pick them up from school and childcare, taking them to the park afterwards, coming home and giving them baths, followed by several other routine activities like physical therapy for my oldest. So, these activities I got to do with my oldest son all the way through he was 6 years old while we were in Australia. Now that we are here, a lot of things have changed for him and that he is not participating in anymore either because of his age or someone else has taken over managing those activities. For*

*example, every day he has a certain type of soup which I always used to make for him, now someone else is making it for him. But every day I do the physical workouts with him especially because by the time I get home from work now, I can't really take him out anywhere. Weekends are a bit different, if we don't have events to go to, I always try to take him out to the playground. (IDI #3, 3.12.23)*

All of the fathers engage in daily activities with their children at varying times throughout the week and more regularly on the weekends due to work commitments. All the fathers shared an openness with participating in playful activities with their children and exploring more opportunities to engage in through physical activities such as teaching their children how to ride a bicycle, taking them to taekwondo or swimming lessons. Common activities mentioned by all fathers included going for regular walks, engaging in child-led play activities, reading and educational activities, attending Friday prayers together, outdoor physical activities ranging from soccer to exploring nature, and school drop-offs.

All fathers mentioned weekends as when they get to spend the most time together due to weekday work hours and commute. Sometimes even weekends get packed with visiting grandparents and family or attending events. Some of the fathers shared other weekly activities such as a movie night or going out for dinner as a family activity.

Some fathers shared activities that their children specifically enjoy with them such as *“building Legos together especially since he has gotten way more advanced than I was at his age so I try to support his advancement. He also accompanies me with my community activities like feeding the madrasa children”* (IDI #2, 5.12.23). Another father shared that *“one specific game she likes to play with me is when I am lying down with my leg propped up, she will jump on me and rough and tumble with me”* (IDI #6, 12.12.23). One other father shared him and his daughter always spend Friday mornings watching cartoons together (IDI #4, 12.12.23). One father shared that because he is more rules-based himself, he tends to participate in activities that require more discipline and structure:

*As a father, I cover areas that require more routine and discipline. Not that the love is not there or anything, but that there is a requirement for someone to be stricter, more disciplined and over all a bit more rules-based. I am more about rules and their mother is less rules-based. Compared to others, they tend to listen to me more when it comes to getting something done. They are depended on their mother for breakfast and lunch which is when I am away at work, then helping the oldest with his online classes. Even if I was home, I don't think I could help with the classes probably because of the amount of patience required. But any type of physical activity or exercise, I always do with my oldest, or take them all out to. play (IDI #3, 3.12.23)*

When asked if gender would cause for any of the activities to be different, most of the fathers strongly replied no. However, the few fathers who did reply yes, clarified that activities with daughters would vary simply because of accessibility such as not being able to go to the mosque together, or give swimming lessons in local pools, or participate in more sports activities together like soccer or martial arts like they can with their sons. In addition to several of the fathers sharing activities that they engage in with their daughters to include tying their hair and taking them shopping, one father added teaching his daughter how to ride her to ride a bike and just letting her be. Another father shared his activities with his daughter:

*Sometimes I struggle with getting her dressed into the frocks with frills and different designs that feel complicated to me or requires a bit more finesse. I am weak with tying her hair because my hands are too big. I am good with drying her hair after taking a bath. I have given her more baths in the 3 years than my son within his 1 year. There was a time when she didn't want to take a bath and I had to come up with different ideas with making bath time more exciting for her by bringing in a kiddie pool or adding more buckets. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

## 1.2 Strong attachment with children

All of the fathers reported strong attachments with their children and particularly within the early years of their youngest children. Fathers described the strength of their attachment through events in their daily interactions. One of the participants shared, “*When she sees me after I come home, she runs to me, gives me a hug and does not want to let go*” (IDI #2, 5.12.23) Another participant expressed their gratefulness for the time he got to spend home during COVID-19 with his daughter who was an infant at the time. He shared that time spent at home allowed him to nurture a closeness with his baby daughter that allowed him to build the strong relationship he has with her now:

*She is always up for going out, especially with me. It also allows for her mom to have some personal time. We play hide-and-seek a lot, I must play! We pretend play a lot- where she is the doctor and I am the patient. She decides what my participation will be like. She also plays with her mother but her mother is more into storytelling. (IDI #4, 12.12.23)*

One father shared the following example of his close attachment with his daughter:

*One other activity, not daily but pretty consistent, is that I try to cook for Raya. She likes creamy and cheesy pasta which I know how to make exactly the way she likes it, or sandwiches and French toast. Whenever I am in the mood to cook or available to cook and nothing has been prepared yet, I will make it. I also get her school lunch ready. She likes cheese sandwiches, I usually cut it into long shapes so it's more enjoyable for her to eat it. I make her pasta a certain way too and even if it's just spaghetti or noodles, she calls it “Baba noodles” when she wants me to make it. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

## 2) Role of grandparents

Almost all of the participants except for one participant expressed their close relationship with the children's grandparents. Most of them either live with the grandparents or live within such close distance from the grandparents that the children often stay with them. One participant shared how the convenience of living so close to the grandparents have been helpful with being more present:

*Since their grandparents live downstairs in the same building, a lot of the activities in my daily routine are very well supported because of them. My mom wakes up very early so if my son wakes up early and I need more sleep I can easily send him downstairs to his grandparents while I get some more sleep. Sometimes we also just go downstairs to mix things up for the children, even though they are very familiar with both environments. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

Another participant whose parents live with them, also shared how the direct involvement of grandparents with the children help distribute responsibilities as well as help the grandparents, too:

*Because my parents have gotten older, so they love to spend time with their grandchildren. My father spends the most time with them, takes them to and from school, helps them with their homework, so I don't have to worry about that. My wife is there and my Mom is there, too. So, it is much easier, and it really helps with the children's socio-emotional needs as well as for my parents. (IDI #1, 29.11.23)*

However, a few participants also shared how participation from grandparents can also pose challenges with raising children. One participant shared:

*There are both positive and negative impacts of spending time with grandparents. For example, the way our parents brought us up is not necessarily the right way. I have*



*noticed that as soon as my daughter hears a loud noise she says "I am scared." Even if she does not get scared, she says "I am scared" when there is a loud noise.*

*Whereas, there have been instances when a cockroach was in front of her and she went after it to pick it up. But that is something my mom is scared of and would scream if she saw a cockroach. I noticed that there was a loud noise and my mother asked her "did you get scared?" and she instantly replied "yes." This concept of fear, the association with the word "scared," is something that was passed on to her within her environment. (IDI #2, 5.12.23)*

Another participant expressed their disappointment and shared how they had learned more from their grandparents when they were younger in comparison with the current generation of grandparents:

*I wanted them to learn more about morals from their grandparents like we did growing up but grandparents now just don't get into that depth because of a lack of patience. Before grandparents would read books with us about Einstein or Aesop's Fables but nowadays grandparents don't do activities like that anymore so we have had to practice more reading activities ourselves with the children. (IDI #5, 11.12.23)*

One father shared his unique example of moving back to Bangladesh from Australia once his third child was born and they realized how much help they needed in addition to taking care of their oldest son with special needs:

*We are very lucky to not only have their grandparents around, but that they are both living nearby and have such close relationships with the children. It is difficult to say now what changes or influences this will have on the children, but going back to my special needs boy, he is very routine based and has specific dietary requirements. He must follow and continue his routine so sometimes going back and forth from these different environments throws him off schedule which he later struggles with getting*

*back on track. At times we do feel like they are being too nice to the children so the children do not do what they are supposed to do. For example, they are supposed to do some reading but since they are at their grandparent's place and they don't want to study, the grandparents let them get away with it. But the advantages are still much higher than not having them around. (IDI #3, 3.12.23)*

### **3) Influence of previous generations of fathers**

In some form or another, all of the fathers expressed the influence their fathers have had on shaping their practices and beliefs about fatherhood. Some of the fathers whose fathers were present but not involved in their daily activities, shared the closeness they share with their own children from their earliest days. Most of the fathers spoke fondly of their fathers and the time they spent with them growing up. Even if their fathers did not necessarily engage in daily activities with them, most of the fathers recalled other qualities of their fathers as the providers of the family that shaped their beliefs about the role of a father. One participant shared:

*I have always known one thing for sure from watching my father and that was how hard someone can work and how committed they could be as a business partner and within the community. Even now, he is very respected. He would always be helping people as much as he could and still provide for the family. (IDI #4, 10.12.23)*

Another participant whose father was not physically present due to work for a long period of time during his childhood, does not recall his father as being absent because he only remembers the good times that they would spend when they would be together. He recalled:

*For me, my father was always the person who was super hardworking. He was the one who would wake up early, enjoyed going to work. He worked in the shoe industry so he was a businessman as well as a job holder so that was a great mixture to see him manage. For me, he was a very adventurous guy because although he was working a*

*job, he would wear many different hats and still manage to write to us regularly.*

(IDI #3, 3.12.23)

One father fondly shared memories of his closeness with his dad from when he was a young boy:

*My dad is the male role model in my life. As we got into trouble as kids, like most kids do, my mom would be the disciplinarian whereas my dad was calmer. I was definitely more scared of my mom when I was younger, I became closer with her after my 20s but I was always close to my dad. He would take me with him to the bank, store, just like I do with Raya now. When I was younger sometimes, I would say “may I go berate?” and he would always take me out. Throughout my life, even now, he has been very dedicated to raising both my brother and I. When both me and my brother were sleeping, my dad would always make sure we were comfortable. I had breathing issues so my dad would keep a close eye on me by taking care of a lot of small details. For example, if I was sleeping inside a moshari, and the fan was on, he would take a small gamchha or light bedsheet and place it over the part of the moshari above my head to prevent too much air or dust rushing around to cause allergic reactions. I have memories of him just walking around and adjusting everything, he was very alert. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

One of the fathers who described the relationship with his late father as “love-hate” shared the complicated relationship growing up with his single father when he started living with him when he was seven years old after his parent’s separated when he was 1 year old. Although his dad always provided him with presents, toys and the two of them enjoyed traveling extensively, his father would quite frequently practice harsh physical discipline on him especially if he did not achieve the highest grades in school. When his father remarried and he experienced further issues with his father as perpetuated by his stepmother, he leaned into the emotional support from his own mother. With the help and guidance of his mother he

was able to improve his relationship with his father. He shares that he learned about the dark side of discipline from being afraid of his dad while learning about motivation and determination from his mother. Furthermore, he shared the influence of his experience on his parenting approach:

*I come from a broken family and my wife was also exposed to a lot of violence at home, we are both very conscious about the environment we provide for our children at home. We are very aware and alert. Maintaining the environment is our most important role.*  
(IDI #5, 11.12.23).

### **1) Influence of religion**

Two of the fathers mentioned the influence of religion as factors influencing their fatherhood practices. One father who was faced with the particular challenge of the possibility of his second child being born with a disability after his first child was already born with special needs, mentioned how religion played a key role:

*Religion helped me a lot to navigate through challenges during fatherhood. Especially abroad, the choice of abortion is very simple and accessible but going through my experience with my first born, religion helped me navigate through so much of it and made me less anxious about the sense of a greater responsibility of being the father to a special needs child rather a normal one. It helped me accept what is in my control vs what is not. Having a belief in something greater and accepting that not everything is in our control. I don't get to practice as much as I would like to especially since moving to Dhaka but these types of reminders always help with becoming a better father.*  
(IDI #3, 3.12.23)

Another participant shared how understanding the values-based system in Islam helped him navigate through challenges during his adulthood. Therefore, him and his wife try to share that with their children from a young age:

*It is very important to teach the why rather than only the rules of religion. Growing up religion was more part of the culture but we did not understand it so it felt more like a chore. My children watch and listen to stories of the prophets to understand their values and examples. When we were younger the storybooks were more about ghosts and witches to instill a vague fear in children but our grandparents would read to us about Einstein and the prophets- real characters and positive examples. The more common books were more superstitions based so we have removed those because there are no takeaways from those stories and instead, we try to share real stories that give them examples of motivation and determination. (IDI #4, 11.12.23)*

Most of the fathers who shared religion as an important factor for guidance or influence in their lives did not express a rigidity in their parenting practices. Rather, there was an openness and fluidity in the way they discussed learning about the religion as an adult vs being forced by their parents when they were younger. This group of fathers all have daughters in their early years with whom they share strong attachments with. Their influence showed a deep faith in the values of Islam and using it as guidance for moral development in their children.

##### **5) Challenges facing fathers' involvement**

All of the fathers shared time as the main challenge with living and raising a family in urban Dhaka. More than half of the fathers who attend office mentioned time spent between work hours and commuting for work as the common challenges keeping them from being involved in their children's lives. Amongst the few fathers who are able to work from home shared their gratitude for being able to spend that time with being more directly involved with their

children but still similar to the fathers attending office, they also mentioned the lack of personal time and sleep as their challenges.

*The amount of time I spend outside because of work and by the time I come home I am quite exhausted physically and mentally. It makes me feel lazier and I feel like I should be spending more time with my children in my waking hours. (IDI #3, 3.12.23)*

All the fathers expressed a desire for having access to outdoor facilities such as more playgrounds and equal access fields to engage with their children in more outdoor physical activities. Most of the fathers also expressed their desire to travel more with their children and share learning experiences while traveling together:

*I want to travel a lot with the kids- travel abroad, visit historical sites, etc. I want to explore with them, that would also motivate me more. Even if I have to check Google, I would love to show them around and learn together! I guess I can show them around locally but I would like more to travel abroad with them. (IDI #1, 29.11.23)*

## **6) Generational changes and differences**

All of the fathers expressed a common understanding of the differences in the fatherhood practices of previous generations and how it has influenced their own practices. One participant shared:

*You have to understand that we are coming from a generation that used to communicate through letters to now having video calls. We did not have the strong communication that we have now. Previous generations did not register the importance of building trust, strengthening communications or having the knowledge and understanding of parenting. Active parenting is very important because parents are the teachers 24/7. We did not even know there was something called early childhood development and*

*that it was available for studying. We understand now how small changes every day for our children lead to big changes throughout life. (IDI #7, 19.12.23)*

## **6.1 Focus on family planning and maternal support**

More than half of the participants shared there was significant time spent with their spouses for family planning since they had always looked forward to becoming parents. One participant shared, *“family planning was important for us so we were mindful with our time. Both mother and father play an important role so we prioritized being financially stable, mentally and physically capable and took time to prepare ourselves”* (IDI #7, 19.12.23). A few of the participants shared their thoughtful planning for how much time they wanted to have between their children for financial purposes or intentionally wanting the children to grow up close together. One father shared that after seeing how much assistance his autistic son needed, they wondered if having more children would take time and attention away from helping their son but also felt strongly that having more siblings would allow his son to have a more normal life along with the companionship and support of siblings as the parents get older.

All of the fathers shared their active involvement in their wives’ maternal health; ranging from attending doctors’ appointments to providing comfort during pregnancies through support with medical complications and nighttime cravings. Most of the fathers also shared their involvement with taking care of the newborn and mother in the earliest days as well as their active support with tending to their sick children. All of the fathers shared it was significantly beneficial to attend the doctors’ appointments to help them understand how they can support the mothers but also how they can prepare themselves. Especially when planning and expecting their first child, the participants shared how helpful the doctors were with answering their questions and understanding their role as a parent. Most of the fathers shared that in the case when they were not available to join their wives for doctor’s appointments, it

was their own mothers who accompanied them or in a few cases, it was their wife's own family members.

Other critical sources of support mentioned by some of the fathers were either their own mothers, their mothers-in-law, or their paid domestic help. A few of the single income fathers who had to work more hours to prepare for the arrival of their first born, mentioned being able to do so because of the support from their mothers to accompany their wives for doctors' appointments and guidance during both pre and postnatal periods. A few fathers expressed sincere gratitude for their mothers' support with finding a reliable and knowledgeable doctor to guide them through the difficult stages of their wives' pregnancies. Another source of support commonly found in Bangladesh is domestic help dedicated to assisting parents with child-rearing specifically and/or household responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, in collective cultures similar to Bangladesh, it is quite common for the domestic help to be considered a close family member as they continue to serve the families through generations. One father mentioned the support of their reliable maid:

*The maid watches the youngest while I am working from home. The maid has two boys herself and has been with the family since my son was born. The maid is very proactive and has settled in with his schedule. She is an early riser like him and that allows us to take it a bit easier in the mornings, especially since I tend to keep working sometimes after putting the kids to sleep. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

## **6.2 Prioritizing time with children**

All of the fathers shared time as a major factor contributing to the quality of engagement with their families. Half of the participants who work remotely or manage family businesses from home shared their appreciation for the flexibility to be involved in more activities with their children throughout the week. Other participants working in an office setting shared their



exhaustion from spending long days at the office followed by frustratingly long commutes due to traffic mostly. One participant explained:

*Compared to previous generations our parents had to work very hard to raise the family after coming home from working every day whereas we have the option to work from home now. I have a very flexible work schedule which allows me to give them a lot of time and be around them. This is something our parents were not able to provide us with is their time, because they would leave early in the morning and we wouldn't see them again till much later in the day, or they had to travel out of town quite a bit. Within our social strata I can see that parents nowadays have much more flexibility with spending time with their children. (IDI #5, 11.12.23).*

Another father also shared their experience with being able to prioritize family with work:

*Maintaining a balance has gotten much better since the last job because it required more direct engagement with the team I was managing. It was the biggest factor for changing jobs so I can have more mental space to handle both work and time with children at home. The current job started one month before my son was born and they had just set up new HR operations and I was the first person to take paternity leave for three weeks in the seven years of the company's existence in Dhaka. I was able to actually take time off work and brought up to speed once I rejoined. I was able to take paternity leave for my first born as well for two weeks and I took a week of my paid time off. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

Another generational difference shared by some of the fathers is the support that they received from their fathers to explore their interests that they hope to practice with their children:

*My dad was much more open with me playing video games and engaging with the computer. He bought me my first computer and subsequent ones till I bought my own. He was very supportive of my interests; he never pushed me towards anything but rather very fluid with his support. (IDI #6, 12.12.23)*

In contrast, other fathers shared the pressures they faced from their parents and the lessons they took from it:

*My parents used to say hurry up and finish your studies so you can get married, take on your responsibilities and then explore your life. Although they never pressured me to be anything big, there was a lot of pressure to do well and have a family.*

*(IDI #1, 29.11.23)*

*My father took studying too seriously where he would hit me way too much. This is why I am more understanding that studying does not have to be end of the world and I don't get upset if my children don't bring home perfect grades. I am happy if they achieve 85% and above whereas my dad would hit me if I got 98% instead of 100. That is why I am more lenient with my children. (IDI #5, 11.12.23).*

## **Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations**

### **Discussion**

The primary aim of this perception study was to examine the activities of urban fathers' involvement in Dhaka as well as understand their perceptions of their child-rearing practices to support the socio-emotional development of children in the early years. In this analysis, the perceptions and practices were examined in a few ways: what they believe to be socio-emotional development for children, how they practice their beliefs and which experiences shaped their perceptions and practices. Focusing on some of the common themes evident across all fathers confirmed that although providing for children's education, health and other needs remains the core responsibilities of fathers (Sabur, 2019), the differences now lie in how fathers perform their responsibilities with more focus on improved communication, active engagement and mindful parenting priorities for supporting the development of their children.

Prior study findings by Sabur (2019) not only confirmed the fluid identity of fatherhood, how fatherhood practices evolve in and across generations as well as throughout an individual's lifetime, but also underscored findings from this study of the interpersonal relationships which play a significant role in the father's wide-ranging involvement in their children's lives. In sharing their perceptions of fatherhood and the influences behind varying dimensions of involvement in their children's lives, the fathers shared how closely their fatherhood practices are also tied to their identities. Sabur (2019) gleans upon previous studies on identity theory which theorizes how fathers' composition of "self," particularly in terms of their role as a parent, tends to fluctuate in response to evolving social and economic

opportunities and constraints along with the cultural fatherhood molds and interpersonal forces. The variations in their development of fatherhood perceptions and the practices shared by all the fathers align with Sabur (2019)'s argument of how the process of "self" construction for fathers particularly shifts over time as they as individuals adjust to varying life events and figure out their next course of action. Whether it was going through life without a father figure, or dealing with the love/hate relationship with a single father, or accepting the challenge of being a father to a child with special needs, the father participants of this study confirmed that no matter the generation, their identity as a parent will always hold multiple other roles attached to it, such as breadwinner, playmate, nurturer, moral teacher and disciplinarian, that may have its own ranking order but will continue to evolve as new circumstances, challenges and obstacles arise (Sabur, 2019).

**Understanding of social and emotional development** Even though the fathers shared varying understanding of socio-emotional development, it was evident through their activities and engagement that it was important to them to ensure that their children are able to meet the same competencies as listed in UNICEF's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS). Fathers understood the importance of children's secure environment and their interactions with adults around them and peers. The father who grew up alone with his single father, expressed the importance for his children to have multiple siblings close in age to play and learn together in a secure environment closely monitored by him and his spouse. Responses shared by fathers showed that they prioritize developing a secure attachment with their children by actively engaging in daily activities and building a trusting relationship with their children. Fathers showed a practical inclination towards protecting the family by aligning their support with their strengths such as being the enforcer of rules and practicing healthy discipline in their routines. Fathers showed a positive openness to engaging in playful activities and also shared a desire to create more opportunities for playful engagement and learning opportunities with their children but a few fathers also acknowledged that there are

times in their parenthood when other roles such as disciplining and moral upbringing take priority, similar to findings shared by Sabur (2019).

**Role of grandparents** In the collective culture of Bangladesh, family is at the center of its people's social lives with grandparents at the core, together forming the foundation of the family's support network. Therefore, any given household in Bangladesh, both urban and rural, will include several generations (Scroope, 2017) either living together or nearby. Features of collectivist cultures such as Bangladesh include both family and nonfamily members tied together, often pooling resources and sharing caregiving responsibilities, practicing coparenting by relatives and nonrelatives, living within close proximity and sharing a communal commitment to child-rearing (Trawick-Smith, 2018). According to Kenner et al (2004), grandparents are the closest alternative to parents in their absence and can therefore provide a familiar sense of belonging for the child. Fathers shared their gratefulness in the interviews for the time and company that the children and grandparents are able to spend with each other. Whether it is through activities such as helping with homework, school drop-offs and pick-ups, or being with them while parents are away, no one comes close to the willingness that grandparents share to being a part of their grandchildren's days, as seen in all of the fathers' cases. There is a mutual sense of vulnerability in children's relationship with their grandparents where grandparents often consider themselves responsible for certain areas of grandchildren's learning such as understanding their culture and heritage and especially language development (Kenner et al, 2004). Fathers understand the irreplaceable nurturing care of grandparents and appreciate sharing active co-parenting responsibilities where grandparents can help promote their grandchildren's positive socio-emotional development by strengthening the foundational parenthood nurturing (Kenner et al, 2004). Kenner et al (2004) also shares that family time holds significant importance in Bangladeshi culture especially with grandparents who often show children how to behave

within social groups, learn about relatives and see where they fit in, gaining a sense of their own identity while also enhancing their understanding of family history.

Bangladesh is still the same collective society as it has always practiced traditionally with grandparents remaining at the core, but fathers shared how these type of important learning experiences they shared themselves with their grandparents are not currently what their children can experience now. This was one area of fathers' involvement that painted a vivid image of how the role of grandparents has changed over time. Fathers blamed social media, excessive screen time and the lack of patience that they see in the grandparents for getting in the way of learning experiences that they expected for their children from grandparents. It is important to note here a major shift in traditions where due to Bangladesh also being a traditionally patriarchal society, men's homes are where the wife moves in after marriage and joins her husband's household to continue raising their family in what is often the father's patrilineal home. Scroope (2017) supports how common it is for married sons to live in their parents' household during the father's lifetime where depending on the family's economic and personal circumstances, the grandparents may also live there. Whereas the joint family system has been typical, the extended family system is also quite common and is integrated into the family's microsystem where the course of children's development in the household is directly influenced by their interactions with all the family members and their unique proximal processes (Hossain & Atencio, 2017). It is apparent that while grandparents and family remain the focus of social life in Bangladesh, the nuclear family system is growing in contemporary Bangladeshi society, especially in urban areas (Hossain & Atencio, 2017) where parents are raising their children more independently while residing close to grandparents where the children can create a second home. Of the seven participants, four are either living directly or in the same building as the paternal grandparents, while the other three fathers are living within walking distance to both maternal and paternal grandparents. Even if some of the grandparents are not actively engaging in the learning activities as

expected by the parents, all the fathers shared the close positive relationship with their grandparents. The nurturing care that the children receive from their nurturing relationships with grandparents is in close alignment with the ELDS' multiple specific aspects and standards outlined under both social and emotional development sub-domains as competencies of interactions with adults and peers, pro-social behavior, development of self-concept, emotional self-control and emotional expressivity (ELDS, 2010, pg.30) for overall socio-emotional development.

**Influence of previous generations** The reference shared by Sabur (2019) claims that the strongest influence on fathering practices and involvement is the individual's own experience in their family while growing up. The distinct influence of the father's relationship and experiences with their own fathers was also evident when the fathers were asked to discuss the roles their fathers played and which experiences helped them define "fatherhood." Even if their fathers were not actively involved in their daily lives, all of the fathers shared the positive characteristics that they try to convey through their parenting practices as well as the negative characteristics that they mindfully keep out. One of the fathers whose father passed away when he was nine years old, appreciated the closeness he has shared with his mother. In the absence of a father, he recalled the struggle of often thinking of the difference having a father would have made in his life. The Children's Bureau (2023) lists children's diminished self-concept as well as compromised physical and emotional security where feelings of abandonment are common and often lead to varying mental health disorders. He acknowledged his wife and her family who helped him find a sense of family and building strong relationships and his father-in-law who he admires for his role in developing a supportive family. Similar to the father growing up with a single father, this participant also channeled the deficiencies to work to ensure that his child does not feel that he is alone. Sabur (2019) shares findings which reflect that across generations, fathers strive to either rework or reshape the fatherhood model that they experienced or they followed the role

model they saw growing up, similar to one of the father participants in the group. Fathers took pride in knowing that they practice better communication and can show affection to their children, something that they believed to have been missing from the parenting approaches of previous generations.

**Influence of religion** Bangladesh being a majority Muslim country, the values of Islam are already embedded within the culture where all the fathers shared an intrinsic expectation of fatherhood in their lives and attributed that desire to the natural cycle of life as a Muslim. Even though having an understanding of Islam came off as important for all the fathers, some of the fathers thought children will eventually develop an understanding of it as part of the environment while some others emphasized it as a priority for themselves and their children to intentionally integrate the values of Islam with a focus on moral development. Fathers shared their disagreement with the approaches shared by adults when they were children that resulted in creating confusion for them, an overall lack of knowledge and minimal understanding. Their current practices developed over time from life experiences and spending time with friends and like-minded individuals who shared the same curiosity for learning and seeking more knowledge to understand Islam. Palinge et al (2022) emphasizes that since every parent hopes for their children to grow into humans with a good attitude and a kind-heart, spiritual education should be integrated from the early years when it is easiest for children to respond to or accept a practice either through expression, speech, the five senses as well as through actions and experiences from the surrounding environment. It is important for children to receive Islamic education to apply the values in their daily lives and to be able to tell know good from bad, right from wrong and live life with more intention. Palinge et al (2022) mentions various methods used to educate children such as using the stories of the Qur'an and the Prophet, education through parables, education by example, education by practice and experience, and cultivating good habits. It is also suggested developmental oriented learning to compliment the children's learning habits by including



learning, playing, singing, learning life skills, learning from concrete objects, and using integrated learning.

Due to increased resources and materials available now through various platforms for both adults and children, by having gained more knowledge themselves, current generation of parents are able to introduce religion to their children and practice it with them with more intention. For example, one father shared how his children only have access to educational programs so he shows them videos on Youtube about Moses because his story has more action and engages the children, as well as videos about Surahs and their meanings. Recent generational practice of a more values-based system has become like guidance for adults and parents looking to instill values for building strong characteristics in their children. For example, fathers recalled attending Friday prayers with their fathers as one of the few major direct activities but while fathers are happy to extend that same activity of attending Friday prayers together, they see it as a major bonding activity where they can also teach their children about the religion and partake in community activities.

### **Challenges facing fathers**

Within the group of participant fathers, there were office-attending fathers who are struggling to find time and energy to participate in activities either before or after office hours and mostly weekends while another group of fathers have more flexibility with their time due to remote work. The latter group of fathers represent the higher-end of middle-income families in Dhaka who are working to manage family businesses that were established by their previous generations. This group of fathers may have more job security and flexibility with their work hours as suggested by a few fathers in the study. Remote work and the ability to work from home has become more common now and something that did not exist during previous generations. These opportunities should provide families with more flexibility over their schedules to allow for school drop offs or enjoy lunch together at home or simply have more visibility with children. Although Ziarat & Atencio (2017) shares findings where

mothers and fathers in urban families seemed to spend significantly more time in routine care, academic involvement at home, and care on demand more than mothers and fathers in rural areas. This flexibility in work/life balance is still a fairly new concept in Bangladesh and requires further studies before drawing comparisons and conclusions.

### **Generational changes and differences**

Whether it was establishing generational wealth, maintaining the traditional dedication to their role as the provider in the family as well as being the sole earner, fathers of previous generations shared different priorities and managed their time differently amongst other past differences within the socioeconomic climate. In recent times, the evolving complexity and fluidity of family structures have emphasized the multidimensional processes allowing families with the opportunities to develop their functional definitions of fatherhood and negotiate paternal privileges, rights and responsibilities (Marsiglio et al, 2000) that have been supported by the developments such as negotiating remote or flexible work schedules or paternity leave, as possible. A small but significant marker of involvement seen among recent generation of fathers is their active involvement in prenatal and maternal care and tending to children's sickness which has been more common in fathers now than fathers of previous generations (Sabur, 2019).

Another aspect of generational differences is practicing more autonomy with choosing whom to marry. Previous generations made the decision with the influence of parents and family members arranging suitable partners based on similar socioeconomic backgrounds but mostly based on obligation to have a family rather than mutual understanding or compatibility (Sabur, 2019). The advancements in women's overall development and changes in gender roles and responsibilities have prioritized more involvement and equal partnership in parenting approaches. Sabur (2019) shares findings that increasing numbers of marriages based on affection and understanding prior to marriage result in a more positive partnership which not only helps men be better partners but also better fathers. It is always possible for

individuals to change as they evolve together and new dimensions are explored. Almost all of the fathers interviewed shared a positive commitment to their roles and responsibilities in tune with their identity which based on evidence discussed here, shows to have been possible with the help of an understanding partner in raising a family.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A limitation of this study was that it was limited to the selected urban fathers of Dhaka city. Even within the city settings of Dhaka, there are fathers from varying socioeconomic and educational backgrounds residing and raising families in the city. Future research should go beyond the parameters of this study and explore a more diverse group of fathers from within varying levels of income status living in urban Dhaka. Another limitation is that it did not include mothers to discuss their account of how the support from fathers are factoring into indirect involvement with the children. It would be useful to understand the involvement roles and responsibilities of both mothers and fathers of current generations.

### **Conclusion**

Similar to how fathers are different than mothers in the ways they interact with their children, the unique role of fathers is also critical in the development of a child's emotional wellbeing. Father's active involvement can boost children's socio-emotional development starting in the early years through childhood and going into adulthood. According to the Children's Bureau (2023), high levels of father's involvement have been correlated with higher levels of sociability, confidence and self-control within children.

The objective of this study was to explore the involvement and activities of urban fathers and gain an understanding of the factors that have influenced their perceptions and beliefs for their children's socio-emotional development. Although the sample size was a relatively small group of urban fathers, the study revealed significant findings for not only understanding the activities of their involvement, but also how fathers' involvement is so

intricately defined by their cultural identity and generational influences of fatherhood within the Bangladeshi context. The study provided a glimpse into how fatherhood practices are changing in urban Dhaka and its contributing factors such as more nuclear families, women's increasing participation in the workforce and overall awareness of parenting. As the role of mothers cannot be denied, their encouragement for actively involving the fathers in their children's lives was understood from the fathers' responses. Overall, further encompassing studies need to be conducted to track the progress of current practices to include factors such as changes in work life (remote and hybrid schedules) and women's increasing and multidimensional participation in the workforce.

While fathers are still aiming to provide for their families, they are doing so for practical reasons of sharing responsibilities with the mother but also with more mindfulness of their role as a father. The participants in this study expressed a strong awareness of traditional practices and an understanding of the differences in priorities from past generations. Fathers from previous generations prioritized involvement concerning the whole family as part of their identity whereas current generation of fathers share a deep and progressive commitment to their children's developmental wellbeing and supporting mothers for the health of their family brought on by increased exposure to new ideas and awareness of positive parenting techniques.

Even within the small group of participants from the middle-income group, there were quite a few socioeconomic disparities and challenges affecting families beyond their control which can be explored further in future studies. However small, the study shared positive trends with current generation of fathers practicing improved communication, active engagement with children and direct involvement in supporting their partner for achieving child developmental outcomes.

## Recommendations

- Conduct same study with mothers to specifically look into their involvement to gain understanding of mothers' perceptions and beliefs
- Conduct further studies exploring generational influences on both mothers and fathers parenting approaches for children's socio-emotional development:
  - generational comparison study
  - ethnographic study
  - changes in work environment and parental engagement
- Conduct ethnography studies to prioritize examining child development in the context of Bangladeshi culture and within different socioeconomic groups in Bangladesh
- Advocacy with health services and medical centers within Dhaka and other metropolitan areas to conduct workshops for new parents to provide a safe space to ask questions and learn about expected responsibilities of fathers and parenting techniques
- Strengthen parent education programs to include secondary caregivers such as grandmothers and other relatives because of the crucial role they play in children's multidimensional development and active involvement with families
- Continued advocacy for updating existing country policies such as National Child Policy (2011) and Comprehensive ECCD Policy (2013) to include activities and competencies of parenting engagement specified by mother and father roles and responsibilities

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# APPENDIX A

## In-Depth Interview (IDI) Guideline

**Topic:** Exploring Urban Fathers' Involvement for Children's Socio-Emotional Development in the Early Years

### Section A

Participant Information						
Date:		Start Time:		End Time:		
Name of participant	Age	Educational Qualification	Occupation	Number of Children	Gender of Children	Age of Children

### Section B

**Urban fathers' knowledge and understanding of the role of fathers' involvement for children's socio-emotional development**

1. What is your understanding of children's social and emotional development in the early years?
2. How would you describe your attachment with your children?
3. In what ways is your relationship with your child unique than their relationship with their mother?
4. Who does your children spend the most time with on a daily basis?

**Urban fathers' child-rearing practices to support children's socio-emotional development**

5. What are the daily activities you engage in directly with your children?
6. What other activities would you like to do more?
7. How are your activities different based on the gender of your children?
8. What are the challenges you face with being involved in your children's lives?

**Factors shaping urban fathers' child-rearing practices for supporting children's socio-emotional development**

9. What was your involvement in supporting your wife's maternal health?
10. What do you remember as your father's role in your life when you were a child?
11. What experiences or who helped define "fatherhood" for you?
12. How are your child-rearing practices different than your father's or the males in your family?

## নিবিড় সাক্ষাৎকার-অনুলিপি

বিষয়: প্রারম্ভিক সময়কালে শিশুদের সামাজিক-মানসিক বিকাশের ক্ষেত্রে শহরে পিতাদের সম্পৃক্ততা অনুসন্ধান করা।

### অধ্যায়: ক

অংশগ্রহণকারীর তথ্য						
তারিখ:		শুরুর সময়:		শেষ সময়:		
অংশগ্রহণকারীর নাম:	বয়স:	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা:	পেশা:	শিশুর সংখ্যা:	শিশুর লিঙ্গ:	শিশুর বয়স:

### অধ্যায়: খ

সন্তানের সামাজিক-মানসিক বিকাশের ওপর পিতার অংশগ্রহণের ভূমিকা সম্পর্কে শহরবাসী পিতাদের ধারণা ও জ্ঞান:

১. শিশুর জীবনের প্রারম্ভিক সময়কালে সামাজিক এবং মানসিক বিকাশ সম্পর্কে আপনার ধারণা কি?
২. আপনার সন্তানের সাথে আপনার সম্পর্ক/মমতা আপনি কিভাবে ব্যাখ্যা করবেন?
৩. আপনার সাথে আপনার সন্তানের সম্পর্ক কোন কোন ক্ষেত্রে আপনার সন্তানের সাথে তার মায়ের সম্পর্ক অপেক্ষা ব্যতিক্রম?
৪. আপনার সন্তান তার দৈনন্দিন সময়ে কার সাথে সবচেয়ে বেশি সময় কাটায়?

সন্তানের সামাজিক-মানসিক বিকাশ নিশ্চিত করতে শহরবাসী পিতাদের সন্তান-পালন পদ্ধতিসমূহ:

৫. আপনার সন্তানের সাথে কোন কোন দৈনন্দিন কর্মকাণ্ডে আপনি সরাসরি অংশগ্রহণ করেন?
৬. আর কি কি কার্যাবলী আপনি করতে চান?
৭. আপনার সন্তানের লিঙ্গের ভিত্তিতে আপনার কার্যকলাপ গুলো কিভাবে আলাদা?
৮. আপনার সন্তানের জীবনে জড়িত থাকতে গিয়ে আপনি কোন কোন চ্যালেঞ্জের সম্মুখীন হন?

যেসকল বিষয়বস্তু শিশুর সামাজিক-মানসিক বিকাশ নিশ্চিত করার জন্য শহরবাসী পিতাদের সন্তানপালন পদ্ধতিগুলোকে রূপ দেয়:

৯. আপনার স্ত্রীর মাতৃত্বকালীন সময়ে আপনার সম্পৃক্ততা কেমন ছিল?
১০. আপনার শৈশব জীবনে আপনার পিতার ভূমিকা সম্পর্কে আপনার কি কি মনে আছে?
১১. 'কে' অথবা কোন অভিজ্ঞতাগুলো আপনার কাছে 'পিতৃত্ব'-এর অনুভূতিকে সংজ্ঞায়িত করেছে?
১২. আপনার সন্তানপালনের রীতিগুলো কিভাবে আপনার পিতার অথবা আপনার পরিবারে অন্য কোনো পুরুষের চেয়ে আলাদা?