

Father's perception on their involvement for 0-3 years old children's cognitive development in urban area

By

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

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
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.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Father's perception on their parenting for 0-3 years old children's cognitive development in urban area

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1. Source of population: Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Badda and Bashundhara

2. Does the study involve:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 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:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| a) Nature and purpose of the study | yes |
| b) Procedures to be followed | yes |
| c) Physical risk | yes |
| 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 | yes |

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 | yes |
| b) Consent Form | yes |
| c) Questionnaire or interview schedule | yes |

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Abstract

The early cognitive development of children is significantly influenced by parental involvement, particularly that of fathers. Nevertheless, the importance of fathers' involvement in the early years (0–3) is frequently overlooked in both research and practice, particularly in urban settings of developing countries. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, this investigation investigates the perspectives of fathers regarding their involvement in their children's cognitive development. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) with a diverse group of urban fathers residing in varying socio-economic neighborhoods of the city, utilizing a qualitative research design. Research indicates that although the majority of fathers acknowledge the significance of their involvement in early stimulation activities, including storytelling, problem-solving, and playing, they frequently encounter difficulties in reconciling their professional obligations with their children's quality time. The extent of their involvement is also influenced by cultural expectations and traditional gender roles. However, there is a progressive transition in attitudes as a result of the growing recognition of the long-term advantages of father-child interaction. The study underscores the necessity of policy support, parental education, and increased advocacy to promote active fatherhood in early childhood development. These insights have the potential to enhance the development outcomes of children in urban Bangladesh by informing family-centered interventions.

Keywords: Cognitive development; paternal role; parenting perception; urban fathers; father-child interaction; early childhood development

Dedication

To my dear mother and father, for their endless love and support.

To my husband, for always standing by me. And to my son, my greatest inspiration.

Acknowledgement

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Almighty Allah for granting me the strength, resilience, and determination to pursue and complete this research. I am deeply grateful for the invaluable support and encouragement I have received throughout the course of this research.

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List of acronyms

ECD Early childhood Development

FGD Focus group discussion

IDI In-depth interviews

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The period from infancy to age three is widely acknowledged as a critical period for brain development, as it establishes the groundwork for a child's enduring cognitive abilities and learning. During this phase, neural pathways associated with memory, attention, and language are swiftly established, rendering early experiences—particularly those that involve adult responsiveness—particularly influential (UNICEF, 2017; Jeong et al., 2019). Although early deprivation can have long-term detrimental effects, environments that prioritize caregiving foster robust developmental outcomes (Yousafzai et al., 2018).

Despite the fact that mothers have historically been the focus of early childhood development (ECD) research, the role of fathers is increasingly being recognized. Recent research indicates that paternal involvement in cognitive development, such as language acquisition, executive functioning, and social-emotional skills, is substantially influenced by play, communication, and emotional support (Rollè et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). The character of father-child interactions may be more influential than the quantity of time spent, according to certain studies (Jeong et al., 2021).

However, in Bangladesh, cultural norms continue to prioritize mothers in the role of caregiving, with fathers frequently perceived as financial providers (Kamal et al., 2015; Moin, 2023).

However, urbanization, evolving gender roles, and the increasing exposure to diverse parenting methods are fostering opportunities for more engaged fatherhood, particularly among urban, educated families (Rahman et al., 2018; Basher, 2024).

Little is known about the ways in which urban Bangladeshi fathers perceive their responsibilities in promoting cognitive development during the critical 0–3 year period, despite these changes. The motivations, knowledge, and socio-cultural factors that influence their parenting practices are rarely examined in the existing literature.

The objective of this investigation is to investigate the perspectives of urban fathers in Bangladesh with respect to their obligations to facilitate the cognitive development of their young children. It also examines the impact of factors such as education, work-life balance, and social expectations on their involvement. The research aims to inform policies that support fathers as vital partners in early learning and contribute to more inclusive ECD programs by addressing this gap.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Rapid brain growth and the development of foundational skills that support memory, language, attention, and problem-solving abilities are the hallmarks of cognitive development during the first three years of life. The neurological architecture required for lifelong learning and adaptive behavior is constructed through high-quality interactions with caregivers during this period (UNICEF, 2017; Yousafzai et al., 2018).

Although there has been an increasing volume of global research on the significance of early experiences, the majority of this work remains centered on mothers as the primary caregivers. The cognitive development of young children, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, is relatively underexplored, particularly in the role of fathers (Lopez Garcia et al., 2022). However, current research has demonstrated that fathers who are actively engaged in shared reading,

storytelling, and interactive play can have a substantial impact on the cognitive outcomes of their children, such as language development, executive function, and early academic readiness (Jeong et al., 2021; Rollè et al., 2019).

In Bangladesh, traditional gender norms continue to significantly influence the care giving responsibilities of fathers, who are primarily defined as financial providers. Nevertheless, the rise of dual-income families, increased access to education, and urban exposure to global parenting discourses, among other socio-economic transformations, suggest that paternal roles may be changing (Rahman et al., 2018; Basher, 2024). However, the extent to which these changing circumstances are influencing the manner in which fathers perceive and engage in cognitive care giving remains uncertain.

There is a substantial gap in empirical research that specifically investigates the perceptions of urban Bangladeshi fathers regarding their role in the cognitive development of children aged 0 to 3. It is challenging to develop effective early childhood interventions that involve fathers without an understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and barriers that influence their involvement, such as time constraints, a lack of parenting knowledge, or limited access to support systems.

Moreover, the absence of a paternal perspective in early childhood development initiatives perpetuates gendered assumptions about care giving, thereby restricting the advantages of inclusive family engagement and shared parenting. It is imperative to address this gap in order to develop comprehensive and equitable strategies that leverage the full potential of both parents to promote optimal cognitive development. This study aims to fill this critical void by investigating the views, experiences, and challenges faced by urban fathers in Bangladesh, ultimately contributing to more inclusive ECD research and policy design.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to thoroughly investigate how fathers in urban areas of Bangladesh perceive their roles and involve themselves in supporting the cognitive development of children aged 0 to 3 years. The first three years of existence are essential for developing cognitive capacities such as attention, memory, language, problem-solving, and early literacy. While the foundational significance of early childhood development is widely acknowledged, much of the research and policy focus in Bangladesh has traditionally centered on mothers. As a consequence, the involvement of fathers in the cognitive domain has remained understudied and underrepresented.

The primary objective of this research is to understand how fathers interpret their parental responsibilities in nurturing early cognitive development. It examines the types of activities fathers engage in—such as narration, verbal interaction, and guided play—and how they perceive their contributions in molding their child’s thinking and learning processes. In doing so, the study also seeks to analyze how various socio-demographic factors, such as educational background, employment status, work-life balance, and domestic dynamics, influence paternal behavior.

Moreover, the study investigates how cultural expectations and evolving gender norms in urban Bangladesh either enable or constrain fathers’ participation. It considers the accessibility of parental resources and the extent to which fathers actively pursue or receive guidance about child development from healthcare professionals, media, or community programs. By delving into these aspects, the study hopes to present a nuanced picture of modern fatherhood and cognitive care giving in an urban Bangladeshi context.

1.4 Significance and Justification of the Study

This study investigates the changing role of urban fathers in Bangladesh, a critical yet understudied area of early childhood development (ECD) research. Although maternal contributions have been extensively documented, paternal involvement is still inadequately addressed, particularly in urban settings where social norms and family structures are undergoing rapid change. The significance of father engagement in the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children has been underscored by recent research. For example, Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) discovered that the education and occupation of fathers in urban slums of Bangladesh had a substantial impact on their involvement in infant and young child feeding practices. Similarly, Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) underscored the necessity of context-specific interventions to improve paternal involvement in early childhood care.

Urban fathers are currently confronted with changing expectations that are influenced by the increasing participation of women in the labor force, the evolution of family structures, and the increasing acceptance of shared parenting. A study by Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) found that fathers' education and occupation substantially influenced their involvement in infant and young child nutrition practices in urban neighborhoods of Bangladesh. Historically, Bangladeshi fathers have been primarily perceived as financial providers and decision-makers, with limited recognition of their potential in early education and nurturing. Nevertheless, global research suggests that early father involvement is beneficial for the development of children's language acquisition, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities. A study by Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) found that fathers' education and occupation substantially influenced their involvement in infant and young child nutrition practices in urban neighborhoods of Bangladesh.

The findings of this study will contribute to both academic literature and practical interventions. By documenting the perspectives and experiences of urban fathers, the study will provide evidence-based recommendations for designing father-inclusive early childhood development programs and policies in Bangladesh. Such initiatives are crucial for optimizing developmental outcomes in young children, as research consistently shows the benefits of both parents' active involvement. A study by Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) found that fathers' education and occupation substantially influenced their involvement in infant and young child nutrition practices in urban neighborhoods of Bangladesh.

Furthermore, this research correlates with broader objectives of promoting gender equity in caregiving across South Asia. By challenging traditional assumptions about parental roles and recognizing fathers as active caregivers, the study contributes to dismantling conventional stereotypes. Ultimately, it seeks to support the development of a more balanced, inclusive framework for early childhood care—ensuring that both mothers and fathers are empowered to cultivate their children's growth in an evolving Bangladeshi society.

Research Questions

1. How do fathers in urban areas perceive their role in the cognitive development of their children aged 0-3 years?
2. What practices do urban fathers involve in to support cognitive development in their young children (0–3 years)?
3. What are the key factors that shape urban fathers' involvement in the cognitive development of their young children (0-3 years)?

Operational Definition

1. Father's Perception

In this study, father's perception refers to how fathers perceive, interpret, and value their role in supporting their children's cognitive development. The extent of their involvement in various child-rearing practices is assessed by their expressed beliefs, attitudes, and awareness.

2. Father's Involvement

A father's involvement is the active participation of a father in a variety of activities that foster their child's learning and development. This encompasses direct engagement, such as playing, reading, storytelling, problem-solving, and providing responsive communication, as well as indirect support, such as ensuring the child has access to resources for their development.

3. Cognitive Development (0–3 Years)

Cognitive development encompasses the mechanisms by which children between the ages of 0 and 3 years acquire knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities. This investigation encompasses activities that foster language, attention, memory, thinking, and comprehension.

4. Urban Area (Dhaka, Bangladesh)

The urban area in this study specifically refers to designated residential communities within Dhaka city, Bangladesh, which are distinguished by their diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

5. Early Childhood Development (ECD)

The physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of children from birth to eight years is referred to as Early Childhood Development (ECD). The most critical stage is the 0–3 year period. It is influenced by parental involvement and nurturing care, and encompasses cerebral development, language acquisition, memory, problem-solving, and emotional bonding.

2. Literature Review

The 0–3 year age range is a critical period for cognitive, emotional, and physical development in early infancy. The brain's exceptional receptivity to ambient stimuli is underscored by the formation of over one million neural connections per second during this phase (UNICEF, 2017; Jeong et al., 2019). The quality of early experiences has a profound and enduring influence on a child's developmental trajectory due to the rapid rate of neural development. Critical scaffolding for brain architecture that underpins cognitive processes such as memory, attention, language acquisition, and problem-solving is provided by responsive caregiving, stimulation through language, and emotionally nurturing interactions (Jeong et al., 2021).

Throughout history, the primary focus of global and local discourses regarding early childhood development (ECD) has been on the mother's role, with fathers being primarily regarded as secondary figures. Nevertheless, a burgeoning corpus of literature now acknowledges that paternal engagement—particularly during the formative years—has distinctive and significant effects on child outcomes. In fact, research from a diverse range of contexts indicates that fathers' interactions frequently diverge from maternal approaches in a manner that is both beneficial and complementary to the cognitive development of children (Rollè et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021).

These developments are particularly pertinent in urban Bangladesh, where family structures, employment dynamics, and gender roles are undergoing rapid change. Fathers are encountering new expectations and opportunities regarding their involvement in child-rearing as urbanization accelerates and our exposure to global parenting norms increases. In particular, educated urban fathers are beginning to re-conceptualize their roles beyond financial provision, recognizing themselves as co-nurturers in their children's development (Moin, 2023; Naheed, 2023).

This literature review incorporates recent empirical discoveries with a particular emphasis on the urban context of Bangladesh. It investigates the ways in which paternal involvement in the cognitive development of children aged 0–3 is influenced by socio-cultural shifts, economic pressures, and institutional frameworks. The review emphasizes the advantages of such involvement and the persistent obstacles that restrict fathers' fully engaged involvement in early care giving. In doing so, it endeavors to elucidate a frequently disregarded aspect of parenting and establish a basis for future research and policy that incorporate fathers as central figures in early childhood development.

The objective of this literature review is to conduct a critical analysis of the current academic and empirical research on the cognitive development of children aged 0–3, with a particular emphasis on urban India. The review seeks to identify the current state of knowledge regarding paternal roles in early cognitive stimulation, investigate the socio-cultural and structural factors that influence paternity practices, and emphasize extant research gaps by synthesizing recent studies.. The present study's objective of comprehending the perceptions of urban Bangladeshi fathers regarding their parental responsibilities during early childhood and informing more inclusive strategies for early childhood development policy and programming will be bolstered by this foundation.

2.1 Importance of Fathers' Involvement in Cognitive Development of Children Aged 0–3 Years

New research has verified that fathers are essential in the cognitive development of young children. Research indicates that children aged 0–3 can experience enhancements in their language development, attention span, and problem-solving capabilities as a result of paternal participation in stimulating activities, including reading, imaginative play, and the instruction of basic numeracy and literacy (Cabrera et al., 2018; Rollè et al., 2019). These interactions offer a dual benefit in a child's developmental trajectory, as they are not only cognitively enriching but also emotionally stabilizing.

Unique qualities that are distinct from maternal caregiving are frequently exhibited by fathers in the context of play and communication. These may encompass interactions that are more physical, exploratory, or challenge-based, and that foster adaptive problem-solving, resilience, and curiosity (Lee et al., 2021). These father-specific engagement styles have been demonstrated to foster emotional regulation, creativity, and flexible thinking in preschoolers, according to research. Additionally, the unpredictable and playful nature of father-child interactions can assist children in the development of executive functioning and self-control, which are critical preliminaries to academic success in the future (Sarkadi et al., 2020).

Evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) suggests that even limited but high-quality father involvement can result in positive developmental outcomes.. In South Asia, including Bangladesh, fathers who actively participate in activities such as drawing, reading stories, counting with their children, and naming objects exhibit significant improvements in expressive language, working memory, and pre-literacy skills (Jeong et al., 2019; Yousafzai et al., 2018). It is crucial to note that these studies underscore the possibility that the quality and consistency of paternal engagement may be more significant than the time invested.

In addition to immediate cognitive outcomes, emotionally secure father-child relationships have been associated with enhanced behavioral outcomes and school readiness (Rollè et al., 2019).

Children demonstrate improved emotional regulation and attention skills when fathers engage in interactions that are compassionate, responsive, and encouraging. Additionally, a father's involvement has a positive impact on the overall parental environment and reduces maternal tension, which in turn benefits children's learning (Naheed, 2023). There are also cascading effects.

The roles of fathers in early learning are mainly undervalued and unsupported by many early childhood development frameworks, despite this evidence. In patriarchal societies such as Bangladesh, fathers continue to face obstacles due to cultural norms, low public awareness, and insufficient policy infrastructure. The subsequent section delves deeper into these obstacles and places them within the broader context of paternal care provision in LMICs.

2.2 Challenges and Barriers to Effective Involvement of Fathers

Despite the growing global recognition of fathers as essential contributors to early childhood development, their actual involvement is still restricted by deeply rooted structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Caregiving remains feminized in numerous societies, despite positive changes in public discourse, which discourages males from fully engaging in the early developmental phases of their children's lives (Panter-Brick et al., 2015). Social norms frequently associate nurturing behaviors with maternal roles, resulting in stigma or ambivalence when fathers attempt to participate in activities such as nursing, narrative, or play. This pattern is further exacerbated by workplace constraints, which include the absence of paternal leave, the rigidity of job schedules, and the lack of adequate policy support, which limit the opportunities for fathers to be present and actively involved during their child's most formative years (Cabrera & Volling, 2019; Lee et al., 2021).

Economic duress, limited institutional support structures, and lack of access to parental education are among the obstacles that fathers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) encounter. Fatherhood is frequently associated with economic provision in numerous LMICs, rather than emotional or cognitive engagement. Public health initiatives frequently perpetuate this divide by emphasizing mothers as the primary caregiver (Lopez Garcia et al., 2022; Jeong et al., 2019). Fathers frequently report feeling excluded from parenting spaces, unsupported by service

providers, and uncertain about how to make a meaningful contribution to their child's development, despite their expressed desire to be involved (Rollè et al., 2019).

These global challenges are exacerbated and reflected by local cultural and familial dynamics in Bangladesh, particularly in urban areas. Paternal involvement is frequently restricted to financial assistance, as deep-seated gender norms continue to depict caregiving as a woman's responsibility (Kamal et al., 2015; Moin, 2023). Fathers who endeavor to exhibit nurturing behaviors may encounter opposition from their extended families as well as their peers. Elders in joint households occasionally discourage such participation due to their concern that it may undermine traditional family hierarchies and established gender roles (Basher, 2024). Despite the changing public perceptions, these cultural protocols continue to marginalize male caregivers.

Another significant challenge in urban Bangladesh is the scarcity of time, as fathers frequently work lengthy, inflexible hours in competitive labor markets. The absence of supportive labor policies, including flexible work arrangements, paternity leave, and employer-sponsored parental resources, further impedes consistent engagement with children (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023). Additionally, the majority of early childhood development programs in Bangladesh are geared toward mothers, which leaves little room for paternal education and engagement (Naheed, 2023).

However, targeted interventions demonstrate potential. Workshops that are conducted in the community and involve fathers have shown the potential to alter attitudes and enhance paternal engagement. For instance, Naheed (2023) indicates that urban Bangladeshi fathers who engaged in structured parenting sessions exhibited increased self-assurance in employing interactive play, reading, and storytelling as cognitive stimulation tools.. Peer interaction was also advantageous to these fathers, as it contributed to the normalization of active participation and the reduction of

stigma. Nevertheless, these initiatives are still restricted in scope and frequently lack a gender-sensitive design that completely addresses the unique obstacles that males encounter.

2.3 Fatherhood in Urban Bangladesh: Shifting Roles and Perceptions

Historically, Bangladeshi society has assigned males the responsibility of providing financial support, while women have been regarded as the ones who are responsible for caring for newborn children. This gendered division of labor has long influenced expectations in households, social institutions, and even development policies. In urban areas, however, this rigid dichotomy is beginning to soften as structural and cultural shifts are challenging traditional norms.

In cities such as Dhaka and Chattogram, fathers are expected to assume a more active role in day-to-day parenting, including tasks related to cognitive stimulation, in dual-income households and nuclear families. Urban fathers are being compelled to reevaluate their roles as a result of the proliferation of media, global exposure to alternative parenting models, increased literacy, and changing educational aspirations (Moin, 2023; Basher, 2024). Numerous individuals now acknowledge the importance of their presence in addition to material provision, recognizing their impact on their children's emotional well-being, conduct, and early learning.

Recent research has underscored a shift in paternal attitudes. Naheed (2023) notes that fathers are now expressing interest in engaging in bedtime routines, storytelling, reading picture books, and discussing commonplace events to encourage vocabulary development and inquiry. These endeavors indicate that urban fathers are adopting a more cognitively engaged, nurturing model of fatherhood. Additionally, certain fathers derive satisfaction from participating in school readiness activities, including engaging in interactive conversations to elucidate the world or

exercising numbers and letters (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023).

Practice frequently fails to meet the intentions of these optimistic trends. The actual level of engagement is still limited by competing work demands, time constraints, and a lack of knowledge regarding age-appropriate cognitive support. Hesitancy is also influenced by societal pressures and persistent stereotypes, as numerous fathers have reported feeling uncertain about their role in caregiving or lacking support from their extended families.

However, the apparent change in attitudes and objectives indicates a trend toward the redefinition of paternity in the urban environment of Bangladesh. Supportive policies, inclusive parental programs, and culturally sensitive awareness campaigns are indispensable for this transformation to be implemented in a consistent and meaningful manner. The next generation could benefit from substantial developmental benefits if fathers are equipped with the tools and confidence to engage more completely in early cognitive care giving.

2.4 Unexplored Dimensions of Fatherhood in Early Childhood

Despite the increasing recognition of father involvement in academic and policy discussions, there are still significant voids in the literature, particularly in the context of Bangladesh. Parenting is frequently treated as a general construct in existing research, with no obvious distinction between maternal and paternal roles. This is particularly apparent in research conducted on children between the ages of 0 and 3, a period that is widely considered to be critical for the development of cognitive and neurological abilities. This oversimplification restricts the capacity to identify the unique contributions that fathers make to the developmental outcomes of their children.

Additionally, the majority of studies concentrate on older children or investigate paternal involvement in a general sense, frequently neglecting the unique cognitive factors that contribute to development, including attention, memory, early literacy, and verbal reasoning. Consequently, the current corpus of research provides a limited understanding of the manner in which Bangladeshi fathers assist their very young children in the development of these specific domains.

Another significant limitation is the scarcity of longitudinal or causal studies that can quantify the long-term effects of paternal engagement. Despite the fact that qualitative and cross-sectional studies offer valuable glimpses, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term outcomes, changes, or patterns associated with father-child interactions.

Furthermore, the majority of studies fail to adequately consider intersectional factors, including socio-economic origin, education level, employment conditions, and family structure. The nature and extent of paternal involvement can be significantly influenced by these variables. For example, fathers from low-income families may encounter distinct obstacles and priorities in comparison to their counterparts in middle-class families, and those in extended families may encounter distinct pressures than those in nuclear or single-parent households.

Despite the increasing interest in fatherhood in urban Bangladesh, empirical research is still restricted in terms of its extent, scope, and depth. The absence of paternal leave, rigid gender norms, and the absence of targeted parenting programs for males are all cultural and institutional factors that continue to impede effective engagement. Early childhood interventions are at risk of being incomplete or exclusionary if these nuances are not comprehended.

In order to progress, it is imperative to conduct research that is more gender-disaggregated, context-specific, and methodologically diverse. This research should investigate the ways in which fathers comprehend, experience, and execute their parental responsibilities during their children's formative years. Not only will this research inform policy, but it will also provide a foundation for more inclusive and equitable early childhood development strategies in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, the literature review confirms that fathers are playing an increasingly important role in the cognitive development of children during the early years, particularly in urban contexts such as Bangladesh where parental roles are changing. Children's executive functioning, language acquisition, and problem-solving can be substantially improved by their participation in language-rich interactions, play-based learning, and affective engagement. Nevertheless, despite the increasing awareness of the issue, significant structural, cultural, and policy-level obstacles persist in limiting meaningful paternal participation, particularly during the critical 0–3 year window.

Paternal attitudes are undergoing a transformation in urban Bangladesh, where dual-income households and exposure to global parenting models are transforming traditional family dynamics. Fathers are increasingly expressing a desire to be more involved in cognitive nurturing and caregiving. However, the transition from intention to practice is sluggish and inconsistent as a result of the exclusionary design of early childhood programs, time constraints, limited parental knowledge, and entrenched gender norms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design to investigate the perceptions and interpretations of urban fathers in Bangladesh regarding their responsibilities in promoting the cognitive development of their children between the ages of 0 and 3. This inquiry was particularly well-suited to the qualitative approach, as it enables a comprehensive examination of the personal beliefs, lived experiences, and parental practices of fathers within their distinctive socio-cultural contexts. The study sought to uncover the fundamental motivations, constraints, and values that influence paternal engagement during the critical early years of child development by analyzing the manner in which fathers interpret their contributions to early learning.

3.2 Research Site

The research endeavor was conducted in Dhaka, the capital metropolis of Bangladesh. Dhaka is an area that is rapidly urbanizing, characterized by a diverse array of socioeconomic categories and evolving family structures. This urban environment offered a perspective on the manner in which fathers manage their caregiving responsibilities in the context of evolving social norms and expectations. The majority of the socioeconomic categories that were chosen for this study reside in the following areas: Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Badda, and Bashundhara.

3.3 Research Participants

The research has included urban fathers residing in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The primary focus was on fathers with children aged 0–3, as this is a critical period for early cognitive development. In order to guarantee a comprehensive representation of fathers' experiences and perceptions regarding their involvement in child development, the sample was composed of fathers from a

variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational levels, and family structures. The inclusion of fathers from both dual-income and single-income households enabled a comprehensive understanding of the impact of family factors on paternal engagement.

3.4 Participants Selection Procedure

The participants are selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that they are fathers who meet the study's criteria. The selection of fathers was based on the following criteria: (1) they must be the parents of children between the ages of 0 and 3, (2) they must reside in Dhaka, and (3) they must be amenable to discussing their experiences with their involvement in their children's early development. In order to acquire a diverse array of perspectives and experiences regarding paternal involvement in child development, sixteen fathers from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels were interviewed for the study.

3.5 Data Collection Tool

The research instruments employed in this study were Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interviews (IDI). Each of the IDI guide and FGD checklist comprised twelve and eight semi-structured questions, respectively. These were intended to investigate the perspectives of fathers on the role of their parental practices in fostering the cognitive development of children aged 0–3 years in urban areas.

The IDI(s) were conducted with individual fathers to collect personal experiences, beliefs, and practices, whereas the FGD(s) facilitated group interaction, allowing participants to discuss shared challenges, cultural perspectives, and prospective initiatives to foster father involvement. These tools collectively offered a thorough comprehension of the barriers that fathers encounter,

the support they believe is essential to improve their parenting practices, and their perceptions of their role in early cognitive development.

3.6 Data Collection Method and Procedure

In order to acquire a comprehensive comprehension of fathers' perspectives on their contributions to cognitive development during the early years (0–3 years) in an urban environment, this investigation implemented a qualitative research design. The data were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). Both personal insights and shared social beliefs that influence fathering behavior were uncovered through the use of these methods.

3.6.1 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

To explore individual perspectives in depth, we conducted six semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with six fathers of children aged 0–3 years. These interviews aimed to elicit personal narratives and unique experiences that may not emerge in a group setting. Fathers were chosen by purposive selection to guarantee representation across all age groups, educational backgrounds, job status, and family sizes, all within an urban setting.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted in the participant's preferred language (e.g., English or local language). Audio recordings of interviews were made (with consent), transcribed word-for-word, and, if necessary, translated into English for analysis.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to complement the individual narratives and investigate collective norms and opposing perspectives. FGDs enabled dynamic group interactions, which could potentially reveal shared experiences and social norms that influence parental behavior. The FGDs were composed of six fathers who were intentionally chosen to guarantee group homogeneity and facilitate a robust discussion.

Structure of FGDs:

FGD 1: First-time fathers of children aged 0–3 years

The initial group consisted of first-time fathers of children aged 0 to 3 years, who were chosen to obtain insights from men at the outset of their fatherhood journey. The uncertainties, discoveries, and early adaptations associated with caring for a young infant without prior experience were likely to be articulated by these participants.

FGD 2: Fathers with more than one child (including a 0–3-year-old)

In contrast, the second group was composed of fathers who had more than one child, with at least one of them falling within the 0–3-year age range. It was anticipated that their reflections would be influenced by their cumulative experiences, providing a comparative perspective on the evolution of fathering practices over time and the impact of past learning on current involvement.

The discussions were conducted in a neutral, peaceful location to ensure the confidentiality and comfort of the participants, and each session lasted approximately ninety minutes. With prior authorization, conversations were documented on audio.

3.7 Data Management and Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies and interprets patterns in textual data. This method was particularly well-suited for investigating the intricate, nuanced experiences of paternity, as it enables the emergence of themes that are rooted in the words of the participants. The material was thoroughly and systematically examined through the implementation of numerous structured steps.

The initial phase consisted of acquainting oneself with the data. This involved reading all interview and focus group transcripts repeatedly in order to develop an initial comprehension and to fully engage the researcher with the content. During this phase, informal notes and initial observations were documented. Coding was performed in the second stage by identifying significant and meaningful excerpts throughout the dataset. In the subsequent theme development stage, similar or related codes were grouped together to create preliminary themes that represent broader patterns within the data. These codes functioned as labels that capture essential features related to paternal involvement, challenges, motivations, and contextual factors. The candidate themes were subsequently reviewed and refined, which involved a meticulous examination of the coherence of the data within each theme and the extent to which the themes accurately reflect the dataset as a whole.

During this process, certain themes may be merged, divided, or discarded. Subsequently, the refined themes were interpreted and analyzed in relation to the research questions and broader conceptual concerns. Particular attention was given to the manner in which these themes reflect cultural norms, individual perspectives, and contextual influences that are unique to fatherhood during early childhood. This process led to the creation of a narrative account and a thematic

map of the data, which elucidates the ways in which fathers perceive and experience their responsibilities in fostering the development of their young children.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

In this study, both IDI and FGD were employed as research instruments. The questions were designed to address the same issues but were phrased differently to ensure consistency and clarity in the responses.. The final versions were developed based on the insights obtained from the piloting process, following a pilot study that was conducted to test and refine these tools. In addition to the recorded interviews and discussions, detailed field notes were promptly transcribed following data collection. This process enhanced the reliability of the study by capturing non-verbal signals, contextual details, and reflections that enhanced the recorded data.

3.9 Ethical Issues

This investigation prioritized ethical considerations. BRAC University provided ethical sanction. The research purpose, their voluntary involvement, and the right to disengage at any time without consequence were all clearly explained to participants. Prior to the event, informed consent was obtained. The data was securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes, and all personal identifiers were removed. Interviews were conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, as topics such as fatherhood and caregiving are sensitive.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

This chapter summarizes the results of six in-depth interviews (IDIs) and two focus group discussions (FGDs) that were conducted with urban fathers of children between the ages of 0 and 3. The investigation investigates the comprehensions, experiences, and participation of fathers in the promotion of their children's cognitive development. The data is used to organize the findings into thematic areas, which are substantiated by direct statements from participants to emphasize the most significant aspects.

4.1 Urban Father's Understanding of Cognitive Development

In interviews and discussions, the majority of fathers acknowledged that cognitive development is associated with a child's capacity to think, recollect, comprehend, and solve problems. In addition, some individuals linked it to the acquisition of language, the identification of individuals and objects, and the cultivation of curiosity. Although the term was initially unfamiliar to some fathers, they immediately connected it to their own experiences with their children's intellectual and behavioral development. "Cognitive development to me refers to the process by which a child acquires the ability to think, comprehend, remember, and solve problems." It is the method by which she interprets the world. (IDI 1, June 30th, 2025) "When I converse with him and he attempts to respond or imitate, that is how I perceive his brain is developing." (FGD 1, July 5th, 2025 – Father #2)

4.1.a Urban Fathers' Perceptions of Their Role in Cognitive Development

A common thread among numerous fathers was the emotional attachment they share with their children and the positive influence this bond has on cognitive development. Numerous fathers stated that a secure and stimulating environment for development was established by

demonstrating affection, being emotionally present, and responding to their children's moods and needs, in addition to structured learning activities. It was believed that emotional bonding served as a foundation for learning.

“When I sit with her and listen, she becomes more open and responsive. I feel like she tries harder to speak and understand.” (*IDI 2, July 1st, 2025*)

“Even if I don’t teach something directly, just being there and hugging him makes him smile and start talking more.” (*IDI 6, July 3rd, 2025*)

In both focus group discussions, fathers acknowledged that their consistent emotional involvement—like comforting the child during distress, or encouraging them during tasks—helped build self-confidence and curiosity.

“If I scold too much, he shuts down. But when I encourage, he wants to try again. I’ve learned that love teaches better.” (*FGD 2, July 6th, 2025 – Father 1*)

This suggests that fathers see emotional presence not only as part of care giving but as a catalyst for cognitive and social development. This theme reinforces that affective parenting is closely intertwined with intellectual growth in early childhood.

4.2 Fathers’ Daily Practices of Involvement in Supporting Cognitive Development

The majority of fathers were actively involved in their children's daily activities, particularly in the mornings, evenings, and on weekends, in order to support cognitive development. Activities encompassed cleansing, feeding, playing, storytelling, and venturing outdoors. Fathers expressed a strong desire to be present and engaged in their child's early years, despite the time constraints imposed by their professional responsibilities.

“Every day after work, I make sure to give at least an hour of full attention to my child.” (*IDI 5,*

July 3rd, 2025)

“I try to be involved in simple daily things like feeding, walking, or helping with toys.” (*IDI 3,*

July 2nd, 2025)

Fathers with more than one child reflected on how their parenting involvement has changed over time, often reporting increased awareness and intentionality with their younger child.

“Now I pay more attention to what my youngest is learning. With my older one, I didn’t think about these things as much.” (*FGD 2, July 6th, 2025 – Father 5)*

Fathers described a wide range of activities that they believed support their child’s cognitive development. These included reading picture books, telling stories, playing games involving shapes and colors, teaching songs or rhymes, and encouraging exploration. Many fathers emphasized learning through play.

“I tell her stories, sing rhymes, and show her how to stack cups or clap.” (*IDI 3, July 2nd, 2025)*

“We play naming games—like asking her to point out animals or parts of the body—and I see she enjoys it and remembers them.” (*IDI 6, July 3rd, 2025)*

Fathers reported noticeable changes in their children’s attention, memory, and curiosity as a result of consistent interaction. Specific examples included children responding to names, mimicking actions, remembering songs, and initiating communication.

“Two days after I taught him to wave ‘bye-bye,’ he did it himself when I left for work.” (*IDI 3, July 2nd, 2025)*

“Now, when I open a book, he brings it to me and waits for me to start reading. That shows he remembers and enjoys it.” (*IDI 1, July 1st, 2025)*

In both FGDs, fathers expressed pride and excitement when observing signs of learning or intelligence in their children.

4.3 Sources of Knowledge and Parenting Awareness

The majority of fathers reported that they acquired knowledge about child development informally, through their spouses, the internet, or colleagues. Although few individuals received formal training, a significant number of them viewed online videos or followed social media parental pages. Some individuals also mentioned learning through observation or trial-and-error.

“I haven’t attended formal classes, but I’ve watched child psychology videos online.” (*IDI 1, July 1st, 2025*)

“We learn from Facebook pages and friends too.” (*FGD 1, July 5th, 2025 – Father 4*)

4.4 Challenges in Balancing Parenting and Other Responsibilities

The challenge of managing time and energy was a recurring theme. Numerous fathers reported experiencing difficulty in maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between their professional responsibilities, personal leisure, and caregiving. Nevertheless, a number of individuals also underscored their commitment to maintaining a consistent and present presence in the face of these challenges. In FGD 2 (July 6th, 2025), fathers expressed that workplaces frequently lacked policies or comprehension regarding fathers' requests to modify their work hours or take leave for care giving.

“After work, I’m tired, but I try to make time before bed. Even 15–30 minutes makes a difference.” (*IDI 4, July 2nd, 2025*)

“Sometimes I just want to rest after office, but I try to remind myself that these moments won’t come back.” (*IDI 2, July 1st, 2025*)

4.5 Evolving Practices of Involvement by Fathers

Experienced fathers discussed how their parenting approach changed from their first child to the current one. Many reported that they now prioritize intentional interaction, cognitive stimulation,

and emotional connection more than they did previously.

“With my first child, I thought only mothers should teach or play. Now I know how much fathers matter too.” (*FGD 2, July 6th, 2025 – Father 3*)

“I didn’t use to read stories. Now it’s part of our nightly routine.” (*FGD 2, July 6th, 2025 – Father 1*)

4.5.a Aspirations for More Involvement in Supporting Cognitive Development

When asked what they would do if they had more time or financial flexibility, many fathers said they would spend more quality time engaging in enriching experiences, such as visiting educational spaces or investing in learning tools.

“I would love to take her to more places where she can see and learn—like zoos, museums, or even simple nature walks.” (*IDI 5, July 3rd, 2025*)

“If I had more money and time, I would get more books, toys, maybe even attend parenting classes.” (*IDI 4, July 2nd, 2025*)

Discussion

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the study's results, with a particular emphasis on the manner in which urban fathers perceive and participate in the cognitive development of their young children. The analysis emphasizes the manners in which fathers comprehend early learning, engage with their children, and negotiate the opportunities and obstacles of active parenting during the 0–3 year period. The fathers in this study demonstrated significant similarities in their endeavors to make a meaningful contribution to their children's development, despite their disparities in background. Their reflections suggest a more extensive transformation in the role of fathers, transitioning from traditional providers to cognitively engaged, emotionally present caregivers. This discussion places these findings in the broader context of contemporary parenting and emphasizes the emerging identity of paternity in urban environments.

4.6 Father's Understanding of Cognitive Development

The cognitive development of children was primarily described by the fathers in this study in terms of their ability to think, recollect, solve problems, and use language. Some also linked it to inquiry, the recognition of people and objects, and commonplace interactions, such as question-and-answer exchanges and mimicry. This is indicative of an experiential, observation-based comprehension, in which development is interpreted through visible behaviors in daily activities. Cabrera and Volling (2019) have observed comparable results, contending that fathers frequently conceptualize child development through practical experiences rather than formal developmental constructs.

Additionally, recent research has demonstrated that fathers' participation in cognitively stimulating activities, such as verbal communication, play, and narrative, significantly improves early cognitive outcomes (Rollè et al., 2019; Jeong et al., 2018). Choi et al. (2021) further underscore the fact that paternal involvement during the first three years is a significant predictor of both cognitive and socio-emotional development in low- and middle-income contexts. The perspectives of fathers in Dhaka are consistent with this body of evidence, indicating that they intuitively identify the most critical milestones for early learning, even in the absence of technical terminology.

4.6 a The Role of Fathers' Emotional Support and Bonding in Children's Cognitive Development

In this study, fathers emphasized the significance of emotional connectivity with their children, arguing that an environment that is conducive to cognitive development is fostered by affection, responsive care, and presence. In addition to structured learning activities, fathers observed that engaging with children in daily interactions, comforting them, and encouraging them fostered curiosity, confidence, and a propensity to investigate new concepts. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that cognitive development and affective caregiving are intricately linked.

This perspective is substantiated by recent research. For example, Cabrera et al. (2018) discovered that children's cognitive outcomes are positively correlated with paternal warmth and sensitivity. This is due to the fact that emotionally secure children are more likely to engage in exploratory and problem-solving behaviors.

In the same vein, Paulson et al. (2016) reported that the emotional engagement of fathers, which includes responsive and nurturing interactions, enhances early language, memory, and attention skills. Jeong et al. (2018) found that fathers' affective engagement in urban Bangladeshi contexts enhances the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children.

4.7 Fathers' Daily Practices of Involvement in Parenting

The fathers in this study reported that they were actively engaged in daily caregiving and engaging activities, including reading, music, playing, and storytelling. These practices were not only characterized as bonding moments, but also as meaningful methods of enhancing the attention, memory, and communication skills of children. This is indicative of a more comprehensive understanding in recent research that paternal involvement in daily activities has a substantial impact on the developmental outcomes of children. Rollè et al. (2019) observed that father-child interaction during the first three years is particularly influential, influencing both cognitive and socio-emotional development in a variety of cultural contexts.

Recent research in developmental psychology has demonstrated that the engagement of fathers can have a direct impact on the cognitive and neural development of children in their early years. For instance, Choi et al. (2021) discovered that fathers are essential in guiding children's attention and facilitating learning through playful interactions. The present study, which is consistent with these findings, demonstrates that fathers frequently employ commonplace routines—including nursing, playing, and storytelling—to not only care for their children but also to encourage learning. The practical comprehension that early learning is continuous and embedded in daily life, rather than confined to structured or formal instruction, is demonstrated by these fathers, who regard ordinary family activities as opportunities for cognitive development.

4.8 Sources of Knowledge and Parenting Awareness

In this study, participants reported that they primarily acquired information about parenthood through informal sources, including online media, colleagues, and spouses. This pattern is indicative of a broader trend in which fathers are increasingly relying on digital and social platforms for guidance. For example, Cimino et al. (2024) demonstrated that a web-based video-feedback intervention significantly enhanced father-child interactions, illustrating the potential of digital tools to improve the quality of care. In the same vein, Wang (2022) emphasized that paternal involvement in early childhood consistently results in positive developmental outcomes, emphasizing the significance of bolstering fathers' knowledge and confidence, irrespective of the source of that knowledge.

Simultaneously, the information that fathers receive may be inconsistent due to the reliance on informal and digital sources. The results of this study indicate that fathers are enthusiastic about acquiring and implementing new practices; however, the absence of structured and dependable resources may restrict the depth and precision of their comprehension. This underscores the importance of creating educational programs that are father-specific and accessible, both digital and community-based, in order to offer consistent, evidence-based guidance to assist fathers in their parental responsibilities.

4.9 Challenges in Balancing Involvement and Other Responsibilities

The fathers in this study frequently identified fatigue and workplace demands as significant obstacles to their consistent involvement with their children. The time and energy available for caregiving were frequently cited as factors that reduced their availability, including the pressure to prioritize employment, long working hours, and limited flexibility. Recent research has demonstrated that structural constraints, such as rigorous workplace policies and demanding

schedules, can substantially restrict fathers' opportunities to participate in childrearing (Choi et al., 2021). These challenges are consistent with this.

Internal factors, including mental health and paternal stress, are also significant in shaping involvement, in addition to external barriers. In a recent study conducted by Deakin University (2025), it was found that the psychological distress experienced by fathers was significantly correlated with the cognitive, emotional, and physical outcomes of their children. This underscores the interconnection between the well-being of fathers and the development of their children.

In conjunction, these results indicate that fathers' ability to balance parenthood and other responsibilities is significantly influenced by both internal and external pressures (stress and mental health) and workplace demands. By implementing targeted mental health interventions, accessible community resources, and supportive workplace policies, fathers may be able to more consistently provide the emotional and cognitive support their young children require.

4.10 Evolving Involvement Practices and Aspirations for More Involvement

The parenting strategies of the experienced fathers in this study were described as having evolved over time, with a greater emphasis on emotional bonding, reading, and recreation. Many individuals expressed that they were more deliberate and attentive with younger children than they had been in their previous experiences, which implies that paternity is a dynamic process that evolves as men acquire knowledge through experience and evolving expectations. Rollè et al. (2019) also observe a growing scholarly interest in the evolving dynamics of father involvement, particularly in contemporary socio-cultural contexts that are diverse and modern. In these contexts, fathers are expected to assume more active and nurturing responsibilities.

Fathers articulated their aspirations for even greater involvement, including the provision of educational resources, the allocation of additional quality time, and participation in stimulating activities beyond the confines of the home, in addition to the description of modifications to existing practices. These objectives underscore fathers' acknowledgment of the significance of enriched environments in the early stages of development. The potential of structured interventions is substantiated by the research conducted by Cimino et al. (2024), which demonstrates that targeted programs can effectively improve the caregiving behaviors of fathers. This suggests that with the appropriate support, fathers' aspirations could be translated into more significant contributions to their children's cognitive and socio-emotional development.

This research demonstrates that emotional attachment, routine caregiving, and play are the primary methods by which urban fathers support their children's cognitive development. These practices are consistent with recent research that indicates that father involvement has a beneficial impact on early cognitive abilities (Rollè et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2021). Fathers' roles as lively companions foster exploration and learning, while emotional attachment and their biological fitness for caregiving are now acknowledged as significant domains of influence (Martínez-García et al., 2023). Informal learning and everyday caregiving were also identified as critical pathways of support, which are consistent with the results of digital intervention studies (Cimino et al., 2024; Wang, 2022). Nevertheless, recent evidence indicates that structural barriers and paternal mental health challenges continue to be substantial constraints, which can have a detrimental impact on child outcomes (Deakin University, 2025).

In conclusion, the discourse underscores the active and dynamic role that urban fathers play in fostering the cognitive development of their young children by engaging in emotional

attachment, daily caregiving, and play. Their practices and perceptions are in close alignment with current research, which underscores the significance of paternal involvement in the development of socio-emotional skills and early learning. Simultaneously, fathers' capacity for consistent engagement is still restricted by obstacles such as paternal stress and workplace demands. These results emphasize the dual reality of progress and constraint: fathers are redefining their role as active caregivers, but structural and personal barriers must be overcome to sustain and enhance their contributions.

Conclusion

This investigation investigated the cognitive development of children aged 0 to 3 years and the perceptions, practices, and influencing factors of urban fathers concerning this matter. Through six in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions, the research investigated the manner in which fathers comprehend their role in early childhood development and interact with their young children in a manner that fosters curiosity, learning, memory, and thinking. The results indicate that, despite the fact that a significant number of fathers were unfamiliar with the technical term "cognitive development," they exhibited a robust, experience-based comprehension of its significance. Through their daily interactions with their children, they identified critical indicators of cognitive development, including language use, imitation, memory, and problem-solving. The role of fathers was not limited to caregiving; they also regarded it as an active facilitator of learning, utilizing storytelling, recreation, music, and communication as instruments for development.

This research also emphasizes the affective aspect of fatherhood. Fathers consistently underscored the significance of affection, attachment, encouragement, and emotional availability

as the foundation for their children's intellectual and social development. This affective engagement was deemed to be equally significant as structured learning, suggesting a comprehensive perspective on development that encompasses both cognitive and emotional domains. The research revealed that the majority of fathers rely on informal sources—including personal observation, social media, or spouses—to gain insight into child development. Fathers expressed a distinct desire to remain engaged, despite the time constraints, work-related fatigue, and limited institutional support. Urban fathers are active, reflective, and emotionally invested in their children's early cognitive development. Some even characterized evolving parenting styles, demonstrating greater intentionality and reflection with younger children than with their first-borns. As a result, this study confirms this. Their voices challenge conventional stereotypes of aloof or secondary parental roles and demonstrate a growing trend toward shared, participatory fatherhood. Although the study offers valuable insights, it is restricted by its small sample size and emphasis on a particular urban context. This research could be further developed by investigating comparable themes in rural environments or across a variety of socioeconomic categories in the future. Moreover, this research underscores the importance of father-inclusive policies and programs that offer practical assistance, knowledge-sharing, and social validation to men who are navigating the early years of parenting. In summary, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of fatherhood in the early childhood years, highlighting the significant impact that fathers can have on the cognitive development of young children through their emotional connection, presence, or play. It is imperative to acknowledge and encourage this role in order to establish more inclusive parenting models and stronger families in contemporary urban society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to support and strengthen fathers' roles in the cognitive development of children aged 0–3 years in urban settings. These recommendations are aimed at policymakers, educators, practitioners, and families.

1. Promote Father-Inclusive Parenting Education

Early childhood development initiatives and parenting programs should actively target and include fathers. Workshops, community seminars, and digital content that are specifically designed for fathers can enhance their comprehension of cognitive development and increase their self-assurance in interacting with their children. Many participants identified social media and mobile platforms as their primary learning sources, and therefore, content should be culturally sensitive, practical, and accessible.

2. Encourage Early and Emotional Father-Child Bonding

The importance of emotional presence, affection, and bonding as critical components of cognitive development should be emphasized in parental materials and awareness campaigns, rather than solely relying on material support or structured instruction. This will foster early and emotional father-child bonding. Fathers should be encouraged to continue engaging in ordinary routines and play, thereby reinforcing the fact that early learning occurs through straightforward, meaningful interactions.

3. Support Workplace Flexibility for Fathers

Workplaces, particularly those located in urban areas, should acknowledge the role of fathers as caregivers. Policies such as paternity leave, flexible hours, or the ability to work remotely during a child's early years can encourage fathers to engage more actively in parenting.

4. Foster Peer Learning and Community Engagement

It is recommended that employers and HR departments promote a more family-friendly work environment for both parents. Encourage Community Engagement and Peer Learning Informal parenting circles or community-based father groups can provide a secure environment for fathers to exchange strategies, challenges, and experiences. Peer exchange can be particularly effective in motivating low-confidence or first-time fathers to become more involved. Local NGOs, colleges, or health centers may organize support groups.

5. Integrate Father Engagement in Public Health and Education Messaging

Health workers, physicians, and educators should be instructed to engage both parents during consultations or visits. In order to avoid the assumption that child development guidance is exclusively relevant to mothers, government health programs and early learning campaigns should address both mothers and fathers equally.

6. Encourage Joint Parenting Practices at Home

Family-level awareness should be increased to encourage co-parenting practices. Through collaborative planning and family discussions, couples can be motivated to share responsibility for cognitive stimulation activities, such as reading together, investigating the outdoors, or reducing screen time.

7. Create and Disseminate Practical Learning Tools for Fathers

Simple, low-cost activity guides or home-learning supplies for fathers of young children can be distributed through pediatric clinics, parenting websites, or local government centers. These recommendations are based on the articulated requirements, aspirations, and challenges shared by participants in this study and should include examples of melodies, stories, activities, and communication techniques that support brain development in the 0–3 age range.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Tools

1. Interview Guide for Fathers

This interview guide is designed to gather qualitative data on urban fathers' perceptions of their role in the cognitive development of their 0-3-year-old children. The purpose of the questions is to have a better grasp of their parenting philosophy, the elements that impact their level of engagement, and their thoughts on the impact they have on their children's emotional and intellectual development.

Participants' Demographic Information:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Education:
4. Occupation:
5. Number of children:
6. Age of children:

(A) In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)'s guideline:

1. **What do you understand by child development?**
শিশুর বকিাশ বলতে আপনাকী বোঝানে?
2. **What are the different types of child development?**
শিশুর বকিাশ কী কী ধরণে হয়?
3. **Can you describe your daily involvement in your child's life?**
আপনার শিশুর জীবনে দনৈন্দনিভাবে আপনাকীভাবে অংশগ্রহণ করেন?
4. **What does "cognitive development" in young children mean to you?**
আপনছোট শিশুদরে " বুদ্ধবৃত্তিকি বকিাশ" বলতে কী বুঝানে?
5. **How do you think a father's role contributes to the cognitive development of a child aged 0-3?**
আপনার মতে ঁকজন বাবার ভূমকিা কীভাবে ০-৩ বছর বয়সী শিশুর বুদ্ধবৃত্তিকি বকিাশে অবদান রাখে?
6. **What types of activities do you do with your child that you believe help their brain or thinking skills?**
আপনআপনার শিশুর সঙ্গে কী ধরনের কাজ করেন যগেলো আপনমিনে করেন তাদরে মস্তষ্কি বা চন্িতাশকৃতবকিাশে সহায়ক?
7. **Can you share a specific moment when you felt your interaction helped your child learn something new?**
ঁমন কোনো নর্দষ্টি মুহূর্ত কআপনশিয়োর করতে পারনে, যখন আপনমিনে করছেন আপনাদরে পারস্পরকি যোগাযোগ শশুকে নতুন কছি শখিতে সাহায্য করছে?
8. **Where did you learn about what helps children develop cognitively? (e.g., family, internet, professionals)**
আপনকিোথা থেকে জনেছেন কীভাবে শিশুর বুদ্ধবৃত্তিকি বকিাশে সাহায্য করা যায়? (যমেন: পরবার, ইন্টারনেটে, পশোদার)
9. **What challenges do you face in balancing parenting and other responsibilities like work or social life?**

বাবা হসিবে দায়িত্ব পালন এবং কাজ বা সামাজিক জীবনের মতো অন্যান্য দায়িত্বের ভারসাম্য রক্ষায় আপনাকী ধরনের চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখোমুখি হন?

10. **Have you ever attended a parenting class or talked to professionals about child development? Why or why not?**

আপনাকী কখনো কোনো সন্তান লালন-পালন বিষয়ক ক্লাসে অংশগ্রহণ করেছেন বা শিশুর বকিাশ সম্পর্কে কোনো পশোদারের সঙ্গে কথা বলছেন? কনে বা কনে নয়?

11. **In your opinion, how do mothers' and fathers' roles differ in shaping a child's early development?**

আপনার মতে, শিশুর প্রাথমিক বকিাশে মায়ে এবং বাবার ভূমিকার মধ্য কী পার্থক্য রয়েছে?

12. **If you had more time or resources, what would you like to do more with your child to support their development?**

যদি আপনার হাতে আরও সময় বা সম্পদ থাকতো, তবে আপনি আপনার শিশুর বকিাশে সহায়তার জন্য আর কী করতে চাইতেন?

(B) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)'s guidelines:

FGD-1: Guidelines for group of first-time fathers of children aged 0–3 years

1. **What do you understand by “cognitive development” in children aged 0–3 years?**

০–৩ বছর বয়সী শিশুর “বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক বকিাশ” বলতে আপনাকী বোঝেন?

2. **What kind of activities do you do with your child to support their learning or thinking skills?**

আপনি আপনার শিশুর শেখার বা চিন্তা করার দক্ষতা বাড়াতে কী ধরনের কার্যকলাপ করেন?

3. **How do you engage with your child? Can you share what you usually do or say, and give some examples?**

আপনাকীভাবে আপনার সন্তানের সঙ্গে সময় কাটান? আপনি সাধারণত কী করেন বা বলেন, সটেকি আপনি শিয়ার করতে পারেন? কিছু উদাহরণ দলিে ভালো হয়।

4. **Have you observed any specific changes in your child’s attention, memory, or curiosity?**

আপনকিআপনার শিশুর মনোযোগ, স্মরণশক্তি বা কৌতূহলে কোনো নরিদর্শিট পরবির্তন লক্ষ্য করছেন?

5. **How do you help your child explore or learn? Can you give examples?**

আপনকিভাবে আপনার শিশিকে অনুসন্ধান করতে বা শথিতে সহায়তা করেন? আপনকি কিছু উদাহরণ দিতে পারেন?

6. **How do you search for information (online or elsewhere) to better understand – how to help your child’s brain development?**

আপনকিভাবে তথ্য অনুসন্ধান করেন (অনলাইনে বা অন্য কোথাও) যনে আপনকি আরও ভালোভাবে বুঝতে পারেন – কীভাবে আপনার সন্তানের মস্তিষ্কে বকিশাে সহায়তা করা যায়?

7. **What kind of support or challenges do you face in actively engaging in your child’s early learning at home?**

ঘরে শিশুর প্রাথমকি শখোয় সক্রিয়ভাবে যুক্ত হতে আপনকি ধরনের সহায়তা বা চ্যালেঞ্জে মুখোমুখি হন?

8. **What do you believe helps a young child become smarter or more curious?**

আপনার মতে কোন বিষয়গুলো একটি ছোট শিশিকে আরও বুদ্ধিমান বা কৌতূহলী করে তোল?

FGD-2: Guidelines for group of fathers with more than one child (including a 0–3-year-old)

1. **What do you understand by “cognitive development” in children aged 0–3 years?**

০–৩ বছর বয়সী শিশুর “বুদ্ধিবৃত্তকি বকিশা” বলতে আপনকি বোঝেন?

2. **What kind of activities do you do with your child to support their learning or thinking skills?**

আপনআপনার শিশুর শখোর বা চিন্তা করার দক্ষতা বাড়াতে কী ধরনের কার্যকলাপ করেন?

3. **Compared to your older children, how differently are you supporting your younger child's early brain development?**

আপনার বড় সন্তানদের তুলনায় ছোট সন্তানদের (০-৩ বছর) মস্তিষ্ককে প্রাথমিক বকিশাে আপনাকীভাবে আলাদাভাবে সহায়তা করছেন?

4. **Have you noticed differences in how your younger child responds to play, books, or communication compared to the older ones?**

খলোধুলা, বই বা যোগাযোগে আপনার ছোট সন্তানদের প্রতিক্রিয়া বড়দের তুলনায় ভিন্ন মনে হচ্ছে কি?

5. **How do you manage providing cognitive stimulation (like storytelling, games, puzzles) for your youngest child along with other parenting duties?**

বাবা হিসেবে দায়িত্ব পালনের পাশাপাশি আপনাকীভাবে ছোট শিশুকে গল্প, খলো, ধাঁধার মতো মানসিক উদ্দীপনা দেন?

6. **How do you ensure your youngest child gets enough attention for activities that boost their brain development?**

আপনাকীভাবে নিশ্চিতি করেন যে আপনার ছোট সন্তান যথেষ্ট মনোযোগ পাচ্ছে মস্তিষ্ককে বকিশাে সহায়ক কার্যকলাপে?

7. **Have you changed or added any specific routines (e.g., bedtime stories, interactive play) based on what you've learned as a parent?**

আপনাকি সন্তান লালন-পালনের অভিজ্ঞতার আলোকে কোনো নতুন রুটিনি (যেমন শুতে যাওয়ার আগে গল্প বলা, ইন্টারঅ্যাকটিভ খলো) যুক্ত করছেন বা পরিবর্তন করছেন?

8. **What differences do you see in your level of involvement in your youngest child's cognitive development compared to your first child?**

আপনার প্রথম সন্তানদের তুলনায় এখন আপনাকী ছোট সন্তানদের বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক বকিশাে কতটা বেশি বা কমভাবে যুক্ত? কেন?

Appendix B: Form of Consent

Informed Consent for Research Participation

Title of the Study

Father's Perception of Their Parenting Role in Cognitive Development of 0-3 Year Old Children in Urban Bangladesh

Principal Investigator

Mrs. Fatema Mahbub

BRAC IED, BRAC University

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Study Purpose

I am carrying out this research as a component of my M.Sc. requirement at the Institute of Educational Development (IED) – BRAC University. This research study seeks to explore fathers' perceptions of their involvement in their children's cognitive development, particularly during the critical early childhood years (0-3 years). The study will involve interviews and surveys that aim to understand the factors influencing your role as a father in your child's early learning and development.

Expectation from you

An interview and/or survey will be required of you if you consent to participate in this study. The interview is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes and may involve inquiries regarding your parental style, challenges, and perspectives on early childhood education. The survey will require approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The data collected will be used exclusively for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

Risks and Benefits

No known risks are associated with participating in this study. The potential advantages of participation include the potential to contribute to a better comprehension of father involvement in early childhood development, which could impact future parental programs and policies. Additionally, your participation will offer valuable insights into the cognitive development of children in urban Bangladesh, as it pertains to the role of fathers.

Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

All information you provide will be kept confidential. No personal identifying information will be associated with your responses, and they will be anonymous. Data will be securely retained and utilized exclusively for academic research purposes. The study's findings will be presented in aggregate form, and no individual will be identified.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary or optional. You are permitted to disengage from the study at any time without incurring any adverse repercussions. Your data will not be utilized in the study if you opt to withdraw.

Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any inquiries regarding the study or your privileges as a participant, please contact Mrs. Fatema Mahbub at 01864669825 or fatema.mahbub.brac@gmail.com.

Consent Statement

I have reviewed and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

(Participant)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

(Researcher)

These appendices provide clarity on the tools and procedures used to collect data, and the consent form ensures ethical standards for the research.