

# Father's Presence and Involvement in Child Development: A Survey to Develop A Fatherhood Module

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i13/12290> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i13/12290

**Published Date:** 02 August 2023

## Abstract

The father's presence and involvement in a child's development are as important as the mother's role in nurturing the child. A positive father involvement is essential to healthy social, emotional, and academic development at all stages of a child's development. However, in Malaysia, data on fathers' impact on children's psychosocial development are limited. Therefore, this study aimed to obtain views from children and parents on the need to develop a fatherhood module. The data were collected through a survey using a set of questionnaires comprising the Father Presence Questionnaire (FPQ), Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI), and needs analysis questions to parents. A total of 483 children and 60 parents participated in the study. For the father's presence, the children's response has the highest mean (42.96) on the father's relationship with his father scale, and for father involvement, the highest mean is in the dimension of giving attention (25.01). Ninety five percent (95 %) of the parents who responded to the needs analysis questions stated that a father should take a specific course on fathering. The topics that should be covered include communication, the role and responsibilities of the father, fathering skills, child development, and the knowledge and skills of new fathers. The results of the study suggest the need to develop the fatherhood module, which can help fathers to enhance their understanding, knowledge, and skills to be effective fathers in the development of children.

**Keywords:** Fatherhood, Father Presence, Father Involvement, Module, Fathering

## Introduction

Undoubtedly mothers are the main pillar in nurturing and educating children. A study carried out by Kellerman and Katz (1978) found that in the family, women often take the main

responsibility for emotional support, nurturing, creating routines, setting rules, and organizing their children, especially when the children are young. In Malaysia, a study of parental participation in Malay and Chinese households in Peninsular Malaysia discovered that mothers devote more time to childcare than fathers (Noor, 1999). Currently, the scientific landscape has evolved dramatically. Numerous studies and professional articles have been published on the investigation of how fathers influence their children's development, and how those findings contribute to the contemporary understanding of the father's role.

Children whose fathers are actively involved are more confident, emotionally secure, and have better learning and educational outcomes. They also typically have better communication skills and cognitive abilities. As a result, parents are subject to constant spotlight from their children regarding their social skills. A daughter will idolize her father as a role model, seeking partners who share the same qualities as her father, just as the son will imitate his father's behavior and develop into a man with similar traits to his father.

### **Literature Review**

Fathers and mothers have different roles in traditional societies, with a father supporting the family and a mother taking care of the house and children (Gurkan, Ummanel, & Koran, 2021).

Father's presence goes beyond a physical and financial commitment to practical and emotional relationships with children (Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; Marino & Mc Cowan, 1976). The concept of a father's presence is a profound and intricate construction of fathers' roles and relationships with their children. According to Krampe and Newton (2006), the father's presence is more of a psychological construct in the children rather than an indication of a father's characteristics or actions. The children's relationship with the father, beliefs about the father, and intergenerational family influences the value of the father, which all show the signs of the father's presence. The opposite of father presence is father absence. The father's absence has been linked to decreased psychological health, adaptive and social behavior, deterioration of intellectual functioning, academic achievement, language development, and increased rates of externalizing tendencies in children (Aldous & Mulligan, 2002; Jia et al., 2012; Lamb, 2010; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

In defining father involvement, one of the most widely used and recognized models was developed by (Lamb et al., 1985). However, Pleck (2010) proposed a revised conceptualization of father involvement that includes three primary components: Positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control. Positive father involvement is critical to the healthy social, emotional, and academic outcomes of children at all stages of development. Several studies have shown that fathers can have a positive influence on their children's development (Parke, 2004). For example, father involvement increases the social, behavioral, emotional, psychological, and cognitive impact of children, which leads to increased life satisfaction (Sarkadi et al., 2008; Downer et al., 2008; Allen & Daly, 2002; Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Fitzgerald & Bocknek, 2013; Pruett, et al., 2017; Baker, Kainz, & Reynolds, 2018).

Without a doubt, father involvement is associated with better outcomes in every aspect of children's well-being, from cognitive development and educational achievement to their self-esteem and pro-social behavior.

### **Methodology**

This study used a survey research design. Survey research provides a quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2014). This survey is part of the development process of the fatherhood module. Adolescents from two secondary schools in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan participated in this survey. The questionnaires were distributed to students in their respective schools with the cooperation of the school counseling teachers. As for the parents, the questionnaires were randomly distributed via Google form to WhatsApp groups of housing residents in the Nilai area.

Two instruments were used in this study. First, Father Presence Questionnaire (FPQ) by (Krampe and Newton, 2006). The FPQ contains 103 items with ten scales, which are: 1. Feelings about the father, 2. mother's support for the relationship with the father, 3. perception of father's involvement, 4. physical relationship with father, 5. father-mother relationship, 6. conceptions of god as father, 7. conceptions of father's influence, 8. mother's relationship with her father (+ items), 9. mother's relationship with her father (- items), and 10. father's relationship with his father to measure a son's or daughter's experience with the father. This questionnaire uses a Likert scale, 1 = never; 2 = seldom; 3 = occasionally; 4 = frequently, and 5 = nearly always. The questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Malaysia. A reliability test was carried out and the Cronbach Alpha value shows an index of 0.942.

Second, the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) was developed by Hawkins et al. (2002). The original IFI contains 26 items with nine dimensions of father involvement, which are: 1. Disciplining and teaching responsibility, 2. school encouragement, 3. mother support, 4. providing, 5. time and talking together, 6. praise and affection, 7. developing talents and future concerns, 8. reading and homework support, and 9. attentiveness. Amla et al (2010) translated the IFI into Bahasa Malaysia and added three religious' items in the "attentiveness" construct to measure the aspects of father involvement in encouraging religious practices.

## **Findings**

The analysis of the study is divided into three parts, i. respondents' profile, ii. descriptive analysis of father presence and involvement, and iii. need analysis for the fatherhood module. The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

### ***i. Respondents Profile***

The adolescent respondents were in Forms 1 - 5. Two schools were involved in this study, Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Desa Cempaka and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Dato' Mohd Said. The total number of respondents from both schools was 483 students. The profiles of the adolescent respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Respondents' profiles*

Profile	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	217	44.9
Female	266	55.1
<b>Form</b>		
1	237	49.1
2	217	44.9
3	4	0.8
4	14	2.9
5	11	2.3
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	281	58.2
Chinese	69	14.3
Indian	116	24.0
Others	17	3.5

Most of the respondents were female (55.1 %) with the majority of them were from Form 1 (49.1 %), and in terms of ethnicity, Malay students were the highest number of respondents (58.2 %).

*ii. Descriptive analysis of the father's presence and involvement*

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation for father presence and involvement in child development.

Table 2  
*Father presence and involvement in child development*

	Mean	SD
<b>Father presence</b>		
Feelings about the Father	46.03	9.69
Mother's Support for Relationship with Father	48.93	10.53
Perception of Father's Involvement	46.59	11.96
Physical Relationship with Father	29.11	9.08
Father-Mother Relationship	48.30	11.72
Conceptions of God as Father	23.95	5.28
Conceptions of Father's Influence	29.79	6.05
Mother's Relationship with Her Father (+ items)	27.36	6.39

Mother's Relationship with Her Father (- items)	15.60	10.27
Father's Relationship with His Father	53.42	14.61
<b>Father involvement</b>		
Disciplining and teaching responsibility	10.97	3.22
School encouragement	11.74	3.31
Mother support	10.65	3.50
Providing	7.73	2.26
Time and talking together	10.14	3.49
Praise and affection	10.90	3.45
Developing talents and future concerns	11.01	3.44
Reading and homework support	6.96	2.21
Attentiveness	25.01	6.94

For father presence, the result shows the highest mean on the father's relationship with his father (53.42), while the lowest mean was on the mother's relationship with her father (- items) (15.60). For father involvement, the adolescents' response is the highest on dimension attentiveness (25.01). The lowest is on reading and homework support (6.96).

### *iii. Need analysis for the fatherhood module*

Need analysis is the fundamental stage for the development of the fatherhood module. In this survey, the parents need to respond to the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) and give feedback on parenting knowledge and skills, and module content. A total of sixty (60) parents were involved in this survey. Table 3 displays the parents' profiles. Mothers were more involved in this survey (80 %) than fathers (20 %). Their ages are mostly in the range of 20 - 49 years old.

Table 3  
*Parents' Profiles*

Profile	Frequency	%
<b>You are as a</b>		
Father	12	20
Mother	48	80
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	18	30.0
30-39	30	50.0
40-49	10	16.7
50-59	1	1.7
60-69	1	1.7
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	21	35.0
2	17	28.3
3	9	15.0
4	6	10.0
5	7	11.7

Table 4 indicates the response from fathers and mothers about father involvement. The dimension of attentiveness received the highest mean both fathers and mothers (28.50 and 28.44). This is followed by developing talents and future concerns (12.25 and 12.04). This dimension can be described as mothers want fathers to encourage their children to develop their talents, encourage their children to continue their schooling beyond high school, and plan for their children's future (education, training).

Table 4

*The response from fathers and mothers on father involvement*

<b>Dimension of father involvement</b>	<b>Father (n = 12) Mean</b>	<b>Mother (n = 48) Mean</b>
<b>1. Disciplining and teaching responsibility</b>	12.05	11.94
<b>2. School encouragement</b>	11.92	11.94
<b>3. Mother support</b>	11.42	11.96
<b>4. Providing</b>	8.83	9.31
<b>5. Time and talking together</b>	12.08	11.27
<b>6. Praise and affection</b>	11.25	11.40
<b>7. Developing talents and future concerns</b>	12.25	12.04
<b>8. Reading and homework support</b>	7.83	8.0
<b>9. Attentiveness</b>	28.50	28.44

Parents also gave feedback on the need analysis questions regarding preparation for becoming parents, how to obtain parenting information, parenting seminar/training/course requirements, and specific topics or content for fatherhood seminar/course/training. The data from the survey are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Need analysis responses from parents on the fatherhood module*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Preparation to be a parent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Enhance fatherhood knowledge – reading materials and videos</li> <li>ii. Attending parenting programs - parenting seminars (offline or online), parenting courses, lectures</li> <li>iii. Asking for opinions and learning from role models or experiences of other parents – own parents, friends</li> <li>iv. Preparation for financial</li> <li>v. Consolidate religious knowledge</li> <li>vi. Mental, and physical preparation</li> </ul>
<b>Sources to get information to become a parent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Internet – social media, websites</li> <li>ii. Sharing with families and friends</li> <li>iii. Reading materials – books, magazines</li> </ul>

	iv. Get information from professionals - community nurses, father figures, kindergarten teachers
	v. Observation – parent’s parenting styles, relatives, neighbor
<b>Requirements for parents to attend parenting seminars/courses/training</b>	Yes: 54 responses No: 6 responses
<b>Father's requirement to attend a specific course/training on fatherhood</b>	Yes: 57 responses No: 3 responses
<b>Method of implementation and period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. i. Long-term course a year (involving several sessions)/ 2 times a month for several sessions</li> <li>ii. i. Father and child program - 2 days 3 nights</li> <li>iii. Workshop – face to face/ online/ contains practical sessions/ bilateral sessions, small group focus, one day/ 2 days/ less than a day</li> <li>iv. iv. Seminar - 1 hour 30 minutes / 2 hours / 3 hours / 2 days</li> <li>v. Slot in pre-marital course</li> <li>vi. Visual - 2 hours</li> </ul>

The mothers and fathers suggested various topics be focused on in the content of the fatherhood module. Table 6 shows a list of the suggested topics.

Table 6  
*Suggestion topics or content for the fatherhood module*

<b>Topic/Content</b>	
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father-child communication according to the child's age</li> <li>• Father-child communication according to gender</li> </ul>
<b>The roles and responsibilities of a father</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept of the leader of the family (as husband and father)</li> <li>• The role and responsibility of fathers from an Islamic perspective</li> <li>• The role of fathers then and now</li> <li>• Father's role in child’s development</li> </ul>
<b>Fathering skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time division</li> <li>• Father Involvement</li> <li>• How to educate boys and girls</li> <li>• Child socialization (father's involvement and children's social interaction/social media)</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge about child development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child's emotional development</li> <li>• Child's psychological development</li> <li>• Child's physical development</li> <li>• Children's health</li> </ul>

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**Pre-birth / new father's knowledge and skills** • Care during pregnancy, birth, and after birth

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**Discussion**

Our results indicate two important points. First, for father presence, the finding demonstrates that children rated the highest rating on the scale of fathers' relationship with their fathers. This result depicts the children's perceptions of their fathers' relationships with their fathers (the child's grandfather). For example, children observed how their father and his father enjoy being together, the father could talk with his father about anything, and the father wanted to be like his father. Krampe and Newton (2006) believe that parents' paternal relationships are important dimensions of the individual's sense of father. Perceptions of interpersonal and intergenerational dynamics in one's family of origin are linked to developmental pathways and life experiences.

For father involvement, the adolescents' response is the highest on dimension attentiveness. Attentiveness is explained by the father's involvement in i) attending events with children, such as sports day, school activities/meetings, and spiritual events, ii) being involved in daily routines or managing the children's needs or basic activities (such as feeding and driving them to school/tuition center) and finding out where the children go and what they do with their friends. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010; Coyl-Shepherd & Newland, 2013; Meyers, 1993) that fathers who develop and nurture positive and active relationships with their children produce significant and meaningful emotional relationships between their children.

Second, for the need analysis outcomes, the parents provided their viewpoints regarding the need for seminars/courses/training specifically for fathers. The majority of the parents responded that the fathers should attend a fathering course or training. The parents suggested the methods of implementing the course or training, such as courses that involve several sessions throughout the year, special programs involving fathers and children, face-to-face or online workshops with practical sessions in small groups, seminars, and also include this fatherhood slot in the pre-marital course.

Fatherhood programs encourage healthy relationships between fathers and their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012). According to Mazza (2002); Perry (2011), the most popular delivery methods for fatherhood programs are educational courses or classes. It focuses on specific areas of parenting skills and knowledge. The programs usually involve fathers attending continuous weekly classes for several weeks or months. In addition, some fatherhood programs also concentrate on providing peer support, while others involve in community outreach. Peer support groups allow participants to share their experiences and difficulties, meet positive role models, and offer guidance to group members (Osborne et al., 2017).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the father's presence and involvement in the child's development have numerous positive implications. Based on the findings of the current study, several approaches can be implemented in the fatherhood program. The activities that can be implemented are based on groups, training programs, or workshops based on the program's goals. As for the Malaysian setting, it is important to ensure that the approach used is compatible with the cultural and religious diversity in the country.



## Acknowledgment

This research was funded by the National Population and Family Development Board (reference no: GPLPPKN0125).

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