

CORRELATES OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT AMONGST MUSLIM FATHERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Using data from 1019 fathers of school-going children aged ten through sixteen from intact families, this study purports to explore father's level of involvement with their children, and factors that correlate with father involvement among Muslim fathers in Malaysia. Findings indicate that respondents who reported high level of involvement by own father, high level of education, high quality of marriage, less number of children and high job satisfaction tend to be more involved in their children's lives. Evidently, both contextual as well as interactional factors contribute to father's participations in their children's life.

Key words: father involvement, intergenerational fathering, marital quality, job satisfaction

Introduction

Past research has grown to acknowledge the transformation of father's role which has moved across time leaving behind the traditional notion of father as a breadwinner for the family (Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda; 2004). The importance of father involvement in a child's life has been given a fair recognition in terms of its crucial roles in promoting children's well-being. Ample evidence suggests that fathers' high quality of involvement is beneficial for various aspects of children's growth and well-being across age (Allen and Daly, 2007; Lamb, 2004; Amato, 1994). Fathers who are involved in their children's life are found to be warm, supportive, loving, sharing the tasks of raising the child, actively participating in the child's activities and serve as role models for the children (Formosa, Gonzales, Barrera Jr., and Dumka, 2007). These positive characteristics represent the three types of paternal involvement, namely engagement, accessibility and responsibility as suggested by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, (1987).

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What makes a highly involved father? Understanding the determinants of fathers' involvement is critical given that various positive physical, socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes have been identified when children are surrounded by highly involved fathers. Belsky (1984) pioneered the parenting model which highly focusing on factors that affect parental behaviour. In the model, personal factors of the parents, child's characteristics, marital relations, jobs and social network are deemed to be influential of the way parents deal with their children. Among the earlier findings, Lamb et al. (1985) concluded that motivation, skills and self confidence, social support and institutional practices encourage paternal participation in children's activities. Pleck (1997) highlights the importance of perceived positive involvement of own fathers which he claimed as vital in shaping fathering behaviour as a notion of motivation suggested by Lamb et al. (1985). Hofferth (2003) claimed that the intergenerational experience of fathering influences one's behaviour as a father, in which her study highlights the role of cultural context in determining father involvement. Other motivation factors as concluded by the authors include gender role orientation and paternal identity. Do fathers prefer their son in order to be involved? Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) concluded that child's gender does not play much role in influencing father involvement in recent years as compared to past decades.

Lamb (2004) further noted that in general, fathers in dual earner families are more involved in their children's lives than those with unemployed wives. This claim may reflect tasks distributions in dual-earner households. However, Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) reviewed the topic and indicate that maternal employment as a moderator in the relationships between factors that influence paternal involvement yield various explanation on the dynamics of the two different family ecologies, namely the household with a working mother versus the other with a non employed mother. Understanding the nature of the different interactions between members within the work-home environments may give better understanding to the phenomenon. Wang and Bianchi (2009) found that fathers with working wife tend to be doing more childcare tasks as compared to those whose wife are not employed. Mixed findings were reported on the role of stress in influencing father involvement. Short term stress as a result of daily hassles experienced by fathers was found to negatively influence father involvement (Fagan and Barnett, 2003), but McBride and Mills (1993) reported that parental stress does not influence paternal involvement.

As for social support received by the fathers and the positive role it has on promoting paternal involvement, Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) concluded that in the context of representative cross sectional studies, father involvement is more evident among those who reported having good marriage. Past research also revealed that mothers play the role of gatekeeper for paternal involvement. When mothers employed positive attitudes (such as not being reluctant or ambivalent) towards father involvement, have experienced positive involvement by own father and experiencing good relationship with their father, most likely for the husbands to be more involved in the children's lives (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Belsky, 1984).

In a country where various ethnic groups live in harmony, fathering may reflect various cultural influences of the Malays, or Chinese or Indians or the other ethnic groups. This paper explores factors influencing father involvement among Muslim fathers in Malaysia. The Malays comprised more than half of the country's population (Department of Statistics, Malaysia – Census 2000), and by the constitution, all Malays are Muslim in Malaysia. Being Muslim-Malay will bring about another notion that the religion, which is Islam, and the Malay custom shape the way of living life. In Islam, the man is the leader for the family where supporting and providing for the family is an obligation. He should lead by example and must be kind to his family members. The Quran clearly indicates that children are the adornment of the life of this world (The Quran, AlKahf (18):46), in which having children can bring about happiness and numerous blessings in life (Paizah Ismail, 2003). An average of 115,000 Malay Muslim marriages was recorded each year in between year 2003 through 2007 (The Department of Islamic Advancement, Malaysia, 2010). With fertility rate of 3.04 in 2006 and 2.94 in 2008, nuclear family is the most common family form that can be found especially in the urban areas (Board of Population and Family Development, Malaysia – LPPKN). Women's involvement in the economic sector has grown tremendously. Following the independence of the country in 1957, more women have been found to obtain better education thus got employed in both public and private sectors. In the year of 2007, a total of 2.23 million or about 56.8% of working women are those who were currently married (source: Malaysian Labour Force Report, Department of Statistics, Malaysia). Therefore, dual earner family is one of the most common family types that can be found in the country. Some researchers (for example, Wang and Bianchi, 2006) viewed the changing in fathers' roles are forced by the employment of women. The inevitable outcome of such evolution is that the demand for males to be more involved in the domestic and household tasks in which would include childrearing. This leads to a shift in understanding and performing fathering roles in children's life. Marsiglio (1993) explained that fathers have equal roles as mothers do, *specifically being the breadwinner, protector, nursemaid, friend, instiller of good values, discipline enforcer, teacher, and other roles that are equally tedious in terms of responsibilities if compared to mothers*. This explanation is in accord with the idea that the distribution of household chores in the present era is divided based on acceptance and *specialization* of the couples (Pleck and Pleck, 1997). However, mothers still hold majority of the traditional roles in managing the family and children; among others may be due to pressure of permanent socio-cultural factor that stressed the father as being the main breadwinner of the family.

Research on fathering within the Malaysian context is at scarce. A study that investigated the differences between paternal and maternal involvement in childcare activities among Malay Muslims families was conducted by Hossain, Roopnarine, Jariah, Abdullah, Rozumah, Rohani and Rumaya (2005). The result showed that the involvement of mothers was relatively greater than fathers. In another study on

fathers of preschool-aged children, marital duration, marital satisfaction and family income positively predict fathering practices amongst the respondents (Muhammad Razi and Rumaya, 2004). Bidayuh (a minority ethnic group in Sarawak) fathers with high marital satisfaction and positive own father involvement was found to be more involved in their children's lives as well (Rumaya and Lim, 2009).

This paper is based on the findings on 1019 Muslim males in Malaysia who responded to self-administered questionnaire. Specifically, this study aims to determine what personal, child and familial factors that correlates with the respondent's involvement in various aspects of their children's life as perceived by the father.

Method

Data for this paper is a subset of data from the research "Fathering in Malaysia: Needs, Issues and Challenges" which was led by the author, funded by The Ministry of Higher Learning (2007-2008). The study was carried out in the state of Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia. Respondents were identified through their school-going children aged ten through sixteen in both rural and urban areas of the state. One of the prerequisites for the study is that the child should come from an intact family. A total of 1019 Malay Muslim fathers were involved in the study. A total of 53.3% of them were from rural area in Selangor. The respondents aged between 30 through 70 with mean age of 44.8 years. More than half of the fathers are between 41 to 50 years old. The respondents obtained an average of 12.5 years of education or equivalent to certificate or diploma or pre-university level with 25% of them are university degree holders. The respondents earned an average of RM 3,152.55 monthly (approximately USD 955.00) with an average of RM 4,101.35 (USD 1242.00) family income. They have been married for an average of 18 years; with more than 60% have been married for more than fifteen years. The average number of children is 4.3; with almost 10.0% of the respondents have more than six children in the family. For the focused child, 43.3% of them were boys. The children aged between 10 through 17 years old with an average of 12.4 years old. A total of 31.5% of these children were first child. Table 1 summarised the background information of the respondents.

**Table 1: Background characteristics of respondents and the focused child
(n=1019)**

Variables	n	(%)	Mean	S.D
<u>Age (years)</u>	(1009)		44.81	6.2
30 – 40	269	26.6		
41 - 50	578	57.3		
>50	162	16.1		
<u>Education</u>	(999)		12.48 years	3.4
No formal education	15	1.5		
Primary school	79	7.8		
High school	440	44.0		
Diploma/Certificate/HSC	216	21.5		
Tertiary level & beyond	257	25.2		
<u>Monthly Income</u>				
Own (n=943)	-	-	RM 3152.55	RM 3484.96
Family (n=949)			RM 4101.35	RM 4944.94
<u>Marital duration</u>	(924)		18.12 years	5.5
≤ 15 years	343	37.1		
16– 25 years	493	53.4		
>25 years	88	9.5		
<u>No. of children</u>	(1007)		4.27	1.66
≤ 3	354	35.2		
4 – 5	454	45.1		
> 5	199	19.7		
<u>Gender of focused child</u>	(1019)			
Boy	439	43.1	-	-
Girl	580	56.9		
<u>Age of focused child</u>	(1019)		12.4	2.24
< 13 years	538	52.8		
≥ 13	481	47.2		

Data collection procedure

Three districts in Selangor were randomly selected for the study. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Multistage cluster random sampling technique was employed in which two secondary and two primary schools from each rural and urban areas of the districts were randomly selected. For each school, eight classes were selected, four from Form 1 classes and four

from Form Four classes. Similar procedure goes to the Standard 4 and Standard 5 classes for the primary schools. All Malay students from intact family were given the questionnaire to bring home for their father to complete in the duration of seven working days. Therefore, a total of 1440 questionnaires were distributed and with the help of class teachers, only 210 were not returned. After checking for incompleteness and eligibility, only 1019 sets were used for analyses.

The respondents completed self-administered questionnaires. Self-developed demographic form was used to obtain data on socio-demographic and economic background of the respondents while established measures were translated, back-translated, adapted and pilot tested to measure the key variables. Cronbach Alpha indicates the instruments are of significant reliability.

Measurements

Father involvement. Data for fathering was measured by scores on Father Involvement Scale developed by Finley and Schwartz (1994). The retrospective scale measures father involvement in 20 different domains of life while they were growing up. Only reported involvement of one's biological father was used in the present study. The same scale was reworded and used to measure respondent's level of involvement with their own children (target child was earlier identified). Various aspects of the children's lives such as morale, emotion, discipline and daily activities were measured in terms of father's involvement. Responses were based on a 6-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 = "never involved" through 6=very involved" in the 20 items measurement. The scale yields Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94 indicating that the scale is highly reliable.

Marital quality. Adapted version of Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al. (1986) was used in the study. An additional item on satisfaction over expression of affection in the marriage was included making a total of four items in the scale (Rumaya, 1997). The item was added based on findings from earlier studies among the Muslims in Malaysia indicating difficulties in obtaining data pertaining satisfaction over sexual intimacies among the couples. The items were measured against a 7-points Likert's scale of degree of satisfaction over one's marriage. The scale reports Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95.

Job satisfaction. A – one item question was posted to measure respondent's over-all job satisfaction on his current occupation.

Stress. A 14-item scale measuring overall perceived stress developed by Cohen (1983) was used to measure father's perception of his stress level for the past two weeks of the data collection process. Yielded Cronbach Alpha for the scale is 0.77.

Findings

Descriptive findings of the main variables

Father involvement. As presented in Table 2, percentage of fathers who reported as having high involvement in their child's life is slightly over than those who reported low level of involvement, 47.7% and 52.3% respectively. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents perceived their own father to be highly involved in their lives while they were growing up. Although more towards the high end of marital quality, based on the mean score, those who reported low level of marital quality is slightly higher than those who reported high level of marital quality. Similar pattern is seen for job satisfaction where those reported low level of satisfaction is higher than those who are highly satisfied with their jobs.

Table 2 : Descriptive findings of the main variables

Variables	n (%)
Father involvement (n=963)	
Low involvement	459 (47.7)
High involvement	504 (52.3)
Mean= 82.48; s. d = 11.96	
Own father involvement (n=927)	
Low involvement	427 (46.1)
High involvement	500 (53.9)
Mean =76.67; s. d = 14.80	
Marital Satisfaction (n=1009)	
Low marital satisfaction	520 (51.6)
High marital satisfaction	489 (48.4)
Mean =24.26; s.d.= 4.01	
Job satisfaction (n=984)	
Low job satisfaction	527 (53.6)
High job satisfaction	457 (46.4)
Mean =5.29; s.d. =1.28	

Over all, the distributions of the respondents' score in the main variables were normally distributed. Only for marital satisfaction and job satisfaction variables that the score seemed to indicate higher percentage in the low categories of each variable respectively.

Relationships between background factors and fathering variables

Table 3 indicates the correlation between respondents' background characteristics, child characteristics and family profiles, job satisfaction, marital quality, own father involvement with respondents' involvement with their child. Significant relationships were established between respondents' education, income, job satisfaction, perceived involvement by own father, family income and marital quality with father involvement. Positive and strong relationships between own father involvement and current involvement highly in synch with Pleck's (1997) and Hofferth (2003) remarks on the role of positive earlier experiences with one own's father as motivational factor for fathers to be more involved with their children. However, whether there is also possibility that fathers who did not experience positive relationship with their own father may also use that as a motivational factor to become a better father, in which his study does not support.

Marital satisfaction of the respondents revealed a moderate and positive relationship with father involvement. This finding is in accord with Pleck and Masciadreli (2004) review that revealed good marital relationship provides fathers with feelings of being supported to perform his roles as an involved parent. Among the personal characteristics of the respondents, education merged to have high magnitude showing highly educated fathers tend to be more involved with their children. Belsky (1984) suggested in his model of the role of personal characteristics and education may influence various personal characteristics of the fathers as well. Educated fathers may have more resources and ideas to invite themselves to participate in the children's activities. This finding is in accord with the positive relationship found between family income and father involvement. Source of income for the family may come from father only or both parents in dual earner families. The involvement of mothers in employment sector may demand fathers to play their own roles in bringing up the children. Belsky (1984), Pleck and Masciadreli (2004) work have pointed out the role of maternal employment in father involvement. Father's high level of job satisfaction was also found to influential of father involvement. This may reveal an indirect relationship, whihc needs to be explored further.

Among the child's characteristics that were tested, child's age has been found to have negative yet significant relationship to father involvement. Fathers are keen to be involved with younger children, furthermore, the types of activites that father can be involved with when the children are younger are numerous, from fun to tutoring activities.

The small *r* values for the relationship between respondents' age, stress level, marital duration, and number of children with father involvement although negligible, the direction may imply that younger fathers, those who are stressful, being married for a longer period of time and have less children tend to be more involved as compared to older fathers.

Child's age is found to be negatively related with father involvement. In other words, fathers tend to be more involved with younger children. This study supports findings of Raley and Bianchi (2006). Further analyses on types of activities according to age may lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon. Child's gender did not emerge to be a correlate of father involvement, thus supporting the mixed findings across research as being reviewed by Pleck and Masciadrelli (1984). This may be due to the age of the focused child which is school-aged children where fathers' involvement may surround academic related activities.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis between personal profile, family factors and child characteristics with father involvement

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Father involvement ¹		.07*	.25**	.16**	.23**	-.09**	.10**	.57**	-.10**	.34**	-.10**	-.14**	-.03ns
Age ²	.07*		-.18**	-.03ns	-.03ns	.01ns	.01ns	-.04ns	.74**	-.02ns	.35**	.27**	-.01ns
Education ³	.25**	-.18**		-.57**	.21**	-.19**	.02ns	.02ns	-.22**	.13**	-.13**	-.16**	-.03ns
Family income ⁴	.16**	-.03ns	.57**		.19**	-.14**	.08**	.02ns	-.06ns	.14**	-.13**	-.08*	-.02ns
Job satisfaction ⁵	.23**	-.03ns	.21**	.19**		-.09*	.30**	.18**	.01ns	.22**	-.03ns	-.06ns	-.01ns
Stress level ⁶	-.09**	.01ns	-.19**	-.14**	-.09*		-.02ns	-.07ns	.03ns	-.18**	.05ns	-.02ns	.04ns
Self-confidence ⁷	.10**	-.01ns	.02ns	.08**	.30**	-.02ns		-.09*	-.04ns	-.08**	.03ns	-.06ns	-.02ns
Own father involvement ⁸	.57**	-.04ns	.02ns	.02ns	.18**	-.07ns	-.09*		-.06ns	.25**	-.01ns	-.11**	.02ns
Marital duration ⁹	-.10**	.74**	-.22**	-.06ns	.01ns	.03ns	-.04ns	-.06ns		.02ns	.46**	.33**	.01ns
Marital satisfaction ¹⁰	.34**	-.02ns	.13**	.14**	.22**	-.18**	-.08**	.25**	.02ns		.02ns	.01ns	.06ns
Number of children ¹¹	-.10**	.35**	-.13**	-.13**	-.03ns	.05ns	.03ns	-.01ns	.46**	.02ns		.04ns	-.01ns
Age of focused child ¹²	-.14**	.27**	-.16**	-.08**	-.06ns	-.02	-.06ns	-.11**	.33**	.01ns	.04ns		.02ns
Gender of focused child ¹³ (0=male, 1=female)	.03ns	-.01ns	-.03ns	-.02ns	-.01ns	.04	-.02ns	.02ns	.01ns	.06ns	-.01ns	.02ns	

Note: *p≤.05 ** p ≤ .01; ns = not significant

Conclusion

The findings revealed that positive involvement of own father, marital satisfaction, education, job satisfaction and age of child significantly influence father involvement. Malay-Muslim fathers in this study imply that intergenerational fathering is crucial, lend support to various past research. Having a blessed and satisfactory marriage is also crucial in encouraging fathers to be involved in their children's life. Having had good education, stable and satisfactory job which yield good income serve as good package securing the positive context of parental behaviour. Fathers were found to be more involved with younger children in this case the primary school children in the study. If one to scrutinize the types of activities that fathers can be involved with these age groups of children, academic related activities most likely will top the list. As child aged, parents, especially those with lesser educational attainment may find it difficult to assist in the learning process.

The findings in this study are consistently in accord with previous research findings. Future studies should also consider on the various types of activities that fathers used to be involved with according to the different contextual factors. Father's level of religiosity may also be of interest to be examined in accord with the Islamic teaching on the importance of providing good role models for the children.

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