

Engaging Fathers in care work: a study exploring the pathway of preventing
violence against women and children in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

For healthy development of child parents' support and care is essential. It is expected that children with an involved loving father have much more healthy childhood and self-esteem. Engaging fathers in care work and child rearing is mean to improve family cohesion and well-being. This research deals with the traditional fact of household burden and familial hierarchy among family members and of course which ultimately leads to domestic violence against women and children. Hence this paper intends to understand whether involving fathers in Care work can result in prevention of violence against women and children. To engage fathers in care work at the household level and using the qualitative method of data collection the research tries to evaluate a community dialogue session involving couples from the rural community organized by CMMS and Promundo US in the Northern Bangladesh. Engaging father results in behavioral and cognitive attachment with partner and children in a family. The evidences from a study become the popular rationales for working with fathers. The project specifically for fathers and sessions for community peoples helped to build healthy relationship among families. The paper concludes with the notion that fathers involve in the care giving work in household domain by showing the challenge against traditional ideology of fatherhood and resist the vibes of violence against women and children in family.

Keywords: *Fatherhood, Children, Violence Prevention, Family, Rural Bangladesh*

1. Introduction

For healthy development of a child his/her parents' support and care is essential and it is expected that children with caring father have much more healthy childhood and self-esteem. Engaging fathers in care work and child rearing is mean to improve family cohesion and well-being. In Bangkadesh fatherhood is no doubt an important element for the future of a child even though it means only the bearing aspects of a father by breadwinning. Despite the usual fact that mothers are the prime care givers and fathers are the authoritative decision makers of children's health, education and social life, there are many fathers involved with their children for a variety of needs specially in rural setting of Bangladesh (Ball, J & Khan, M). So, violence against children in household level in our social context is closely linked up with household

parenting culture. Any form of violence impacting children's future, and in accordance with article 19 of the Convention and the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, violence included, all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (UN, 1993). To involve father in care work and child rearing task would be the essential initiative of men engagement specially fathers, it also explored how men's positive involvement in care giving activities and domestic chores bring positive changes to ensure women's empowerment from the Gender and Development (GAD) approach focusing gender roles. By engaging community people, particularly fathers and mothers with children aged between 0-5, this study explored context specific strategies for adopting program P in Bangladeshi communities. While contributing to the evaluation of successive implementation within targeted areas it also focused,

- to know the status of violence against children at the household level
- on non-violent participation of fathers in the household level and the need of engaging them
- to examine whether the engagement of fathers in care work can result in prevention of violence against women and children

2. Methodology

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. Quantitative method consists of a survey while qualitative methods include FGDs, KIIs, and case studies. Key Informants were chosen for interview from the FGDs being conducted. Case Study methods were applied to select the positive cases of fatherhood to be interviewed. To supplement qualitative findings a structured questionnaire was used for the quantitative data collection. Data collection and sampling has been done in three phases. Phase I included a Quantitative survey using structured questionnaire among 350 couples. Phase II consists of Qualitative data collection process using FGD and KII. In 5 districts, FGDs were therefore 45 in total ((1 men group + 1 women group + 1 mixed group). Phase III emphasized on triangulation of data including in-depth interviews to be conducted among the relevant stakeholders.

3. Status of violence against children in household level

This section depicted the status of violence against children within households among ten study areas in Bangladesh. Considering the mainstream Muslim and also ethnic minorities living at the edge of the country, it aimed to look at parents' perception towards violence against children, its form, perpetrators and also the reasons behind.

3.1 Parent's Perception towards Violence against Children

Parent's perception towards violence against children mainly sticks around controlling their children to make them good human being. Respondents from the visited areas mostly believe children can be controlled either by scaring or beating. Counseling children might be the best way to make them understand in a positive way, believes a few but to the majority it is all about guiding children to follow the rules and regulations set by parents. To many of the respondents disciplining children means rearing them, scolding or beating them when they act wrong or scream for not studying. While interviewing the couples of it was commonly observed that caring or controlling children is solely mother's responsibility. While conducting FGDs some children were found instantly being beaten by their mothers for making noise and disturbance. Specially young mothers who lack proper knowledge on parenting, usually thinks their children should definitely be reared the way they were being treated by their parents. Among 350 respondents, 73 considered shouting/scolding, 72 considered slapping, 94 considered threatening and 111 persons considered beating as violence against children. On the other hand, among 316 mothers in the studied areas, 52 considered shouting/scolding as violence against children whereas 62 considered slapping, 86 considered threatening and 116 mothers considered beating as violence against children. So, it can be said that violence against children commonly practiced among parents in Bangladesh, there are also exceptions.

3.2 Reasons of VAC

Among multiple reasons, poverty, intersectional differences, disobeying elders, children's lack of interest to go to school and also parents' level of education have been identified as key areas of concern. *Poverty* contributes to the causes of violence against children within household from many aspects. It often gives rise to parents' dissatisfaction for not affording the desired food, clothes or toys for children bargaining for long. Most of the respondents believe money or economic solvency is must for rearing children properly. Without money it is neither possible to buy healthy food, necessary clothes or bear their child's medical and

educational expenses nor fulfill children's demands. *Intersectionality* mostly refers to the study of intersections between forms or systems of domination. It addresses racism, patriarchy, economic disadvantages and other discriminatory systems creating inequalities in positioning women, men and other groups. Therefore the cases of battering or threatening girl child are more prone in Hindu communities than Muslims. *Disobeying elders and not being discipline* are vital reasons for which children are being scolded or beaten by parents. They found children of today's age as naughty and not listening to their parent's or elders. To teach them this lesson from the very beginning, parents try to control their children. *Unwillingness of going to School* is another reason towards violence. Parents force them to go to school by scolding, beating in case of their denial. Parent's authoritative tendency of controlling children as their main responsibility and justifying violent attitudes like beating, slapping or threatening as controlling methods usually expose children to violence. Being illiterate parents lack proper guidance of child caring and rearing, behaving with unruly child. Failing to understand traditional child controlling methods as violence, specially mothers do such misconducts with their children as they are solely responsible for child caring. On the other hand, fathers' minimum participation in children's life does not add much value in child rearing. Their participation in the recreational events for the children increases mother's tension and crisis with significant, long-lasting impact on the children's lives. Engaging men in this regard therefore is very necessary to combat violence against children.

3.3 Perpetrators of Violence

Violence against children enacted by family members has severe and worse impact on children as they hardly identify the perpetrators. Violence against children by relatives neighbours or any close family members are commonly evidenced in our studied communities which unfortunately go unreported for many of the cases. This research also evidenced such cases of violence against children which families usually want to keep private for privacy and other social issues. Violence against children is often perpetrated by the parents. The study sample shows among parents, the ratio of violence by mothers is higher than fathers. Considering the amount of time spent for accomplishing child care responsibilities and their upbringing, women are mostly found abusive towards children across ethnic and Bengali communities. But men's use of violence is also high in both the communities also reflects the sex difference in perpetration of violence against children by parents. Other family member's

(grand parent, uncle, aunt or siblings) use of violence like scolding, scaring or beating is also prevalent in communities which are hardly welcomed by mothers.

4. Participation of fathers in the household level

Husband's reluctance in household or child care activities has been reported by the wives. Most of them accused their husbands for not sharing responsibilities of household chores or child care even when they were sick or pregnant expecting special care from husbands. Following graph shows 45.7% men and 53.6% women disagreed with the statement that it is only mother's duty to raise their children. Qualitative data shows whether women agree or disagree with the fact, they have nothing but to accomplish the child care activities in reality. While male respondents were interviewed about their participation in the household chores, they commonly replied that the society do not permit them to take part in such work. Fulfilling some of the demands of their children like buying chocolates or taking the baby on the lap when they are free is ok with them but doing any other work like cleaning or cooking food is not acceptable for them. In a traditional society like Bangladesh, fathers usually possess the patriarchal ideologies that their only responsibility is to earn money for their family's well being. Specially fathers in the remote places hardly understand how their little effort can bring positive changes to the family. Rearing children for example is primarily considered as feminine job within the study areas. It was quite common and expected that women will take care of the household chores. Male respondents strongly believed, only female members have the responsibility to do regular household works besides their caring role. Because male members of the family are mostly responsible for bread earning tasks, unless their wives fall sick, they consider their household engagement as waste of energy.

5. Pathways of preventing violence against women and children

Men involved in care work is an important indicator of more gender equitable practice though few of them have to do out of necessity, may be for poverty, or associated with illness of the family members bring into care work. Some other men perceive care work as part of their commitment and for the better future of their child and family. To prevent men's violence against women our concept was about traditional masculinity must change or reshape. New models of masculinity which are not based on domination, power and control, are to be

developed (Connell, 1995). Being more engaged in the day to day care of their children, fathers have a real opportunity to reshape dominant ideas about masculinity. Fathers can help to prevent violence against women by: 1) being non-violent; 2) respecting his wife/partner; 3) Promoting gender equality and equitable practices; 4) help in household; 5) Sharing family decisions. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity for men to actively work towards the creation and maintenance of equal and respectful relationships with women. Furthermore, all these activities directly or indirectly relay on engaging a man in household care work and child rearing. Care is often interpreted through expectations of protecting and providing for families, a marker of good fatherhood practice. The interesting part of this project was to find few strong male ‘role model’ who through their lives being an example both for advice and actions to express of caring father/loving father. It is proved somehow that fathers showed prominent features of their caring generally hold an alignment with gender equitable practices and more concerned about preventing violence against women and children. Role models is another key contribution of this project that known fathers introduced in community to inspire particularly the young men. Our findings provide some evidence to support yet we ready to admit that being in a patriarchal positions a father may be caring but not always supportive towards violence prevention but it is also true that majority of caring and supportive fathers are positively responsive in care works. This study was exploratory and mixed method study it is impossible to generalize from the findings to all men who does actually care!

6. Conclusion

Any form of violence against children is a violation of basic rights of children. Physical, social and mental development of children are obstructed when they are deprived of unconditional love and affection. Children who witness violence between parents are prone to behavioural and emotional learning difficulties resulting in long term development problems like aggressive attitude, anxiety or depression. The impacts of family violence and child abuse found in this research owed to a number of causal and contributory factors like poverty, early marriage and dowry, marital discord, father’s reluctance to share household and child care responsibilities etc. Besides parents’ negligence toward children’s area of interest and specially father’s reluctance to share child rearing responsibilities have been identified as key areas of concern. This study therefore looked forward to the extent of engaging fathers in commonly

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perceived deficiency areas ranging from providing less child support to limited involvement in domestic chores, in the broader interest of ensuring gender equality. Considering socio-economic class, religion and educational attainment as important variables, men's participation within household were much expected in every community being studied in this research. Prior responsibility of protecting children from all forms of violence therefore ultimately goes to family members, parents to be specific.

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