
Father Involvement Among Malay Muslims in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article reports on findings from a study of 989 fathers of school-going children aged 10 through 16 from intact families in rural and urban areas in Selangor, Malaysia. The study aims to explore the factors that affect father involvement among Malay Muslims. Results indicate that fathers' education, marital quality, and number of children are significantly related to their involvement in children's lives. Fathers' perceptions of their own fathers' involvement when they were young is also positively associated with their involvement with children, supporting the concept of intergenerational fathering in social learning theory. Muslim fathers see financial provisioning, moral teaching, praying, reciting the Quran, and fasting together with children as their religious duties that God entrusts to them to fulfill both world and after-life purposes. However, they cite lack of time and a common wish to be more involved in their children's life.

Keywords

fathering, father involvement, intergenerational fathering, marital satisfaction

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Introduction

Parents play a significant role in the socialization process of their off-spring. For as long as it has been documented, in general, mothers are known as the primary and natural social agents for children, followed by fathers. Because of the social changes that have taken place globally, the role of fathers in the lives of their children has received increasing attention as more studies reveal positive child outcomes associated with highly involved fathers or paternal figures (Amato, 1994; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). In Malaysia, women have become actively involved in the labor force, and expectations of fathers to be more involved in household chores and parenting have increased. According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2011), 46.1% or 4.17 million women in the age group of 15 to 64 years are actively involved in the work force. Most employed women (20.1%) are service or sales workers, whereas 19.7% are in the clerical sector. About 8.4% are in the professional sector (medicine, education, etc.), along with 5.2% in legislation, or working as senior officials and managers. The Malaysia Labour Force Survey Report reveals that as of 2010, a total of 2.46 million or about 59% of working women were married (Department of Statistics, 2011). The high involvement of married women in the labor force may have brought marked changes in fathering roles in the modern Malay Muslim families as it has done in other parts of the world.

Malaysia is a multiethnic country consisting of Malays (49.6%), Chinese, Indians, and others (Department of Statistics, 2010). Marriage rates are near universal. Divorce rates are much lower and fertility rates are higher than in most Western societies. Although the official divorce rate has never been calculated for the country, the recorded divorce cases have been increasing across the years. In 2009, the number of registered marriages for Muslims was 135,136 while 27,116 registered divorce cases were recorded within the same year (Department of Statistics, 2010). The fertility rate for Malaysia was 2.33 in 2009 compared with 2.98 in 2000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The socialization of children in Malaysia is shaped by the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious climates of the families from these various ethnic groups. For the Malays, Islam is the core of the socialization process. The whole cultural and social norms are based on Islamic teaching (Effendy, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses the idea that parenting occurs within the social context. This notion is further established in the work of Lamb (1987), who highlights the importance of culture in shaping paternal roles. For Malays, father involvement can best be understood in light of the values and

customs that are embedded in their culture. Two main factors—the Islamic religion and the culture of the Malays—are critical in this context. Malays in Malaysia are Muslims who mostly abide by the *sunni* tradition, living by the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and following the *syariah* law. Ibn Ashur (2006) notes that in Islam being married is the only acknowledged legal form of producing off-spring and that procreation is one of the most important functions of family life. Parents are entrusted with love and care of their children and are accountable for their proper upbringing, both in this life and the life hereafter. Parenting in general for the Malays encompasses the tasks of ensuring proper upbringing of the child to lead a balanced life, for the present as well as for the future. Equipping the child with worldly and religious knowledge is one of the major tasks of parents (Effendy, 2006). Culturally, Malay families have always been patriarchal. Research on fatherhood in various countries has mushroomed since the 1970s with a focus on fathering, father involvement, father absence, paternity, and identity. However, such research within the Malaysian context is still scarce. This article sets out to examine the relationship between father's characteristics, child characteristics, and contextual factors with father involvement among Malay Muslims in Malaysia. We depict the multidimensional concept of father involvement among the Malays, with considerations for the unique culture of the Malay people and their Islamic way of life.

Fatherhood and Father Involvement

In fatherhood literature, fathering has generally been recognized as a multifaceted concept (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Belsky (1984), in accord with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, claims that parenting is a process that occurs within a specific social context. Belsky's model of determinants of functional parenting outlines the characteristics of individual parents (personality), child characteristics, and the social context where the relationships between parent and child exist, such as the marital relationship, social network, and job experience, as predictors of parenting. In a study using time diaries in the United States, Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth (2001) examine father-child activities including personal care, companionship, achievement-related activities, household activities, and social activities. Such father-child interaction, however, varies by both father's characteristics and child's age and gender. Bradford and Hawkins (2006) coins the term *competent fathering* to imply the developmental aspect of cognitive, affective, and

behavioral dimensions of fathering, where abilities, skills, and identities of a father evolve and are developed over time.

The father involvement construct has been detailed in various forms. Finley and Schwartz (2004) mention several key points of father involvement: (a) it is a highly differentiated construct and a father may or may not be involved in the various aspects of his child's life, (b) a child's perception of father involvement is more important than the amount of time a father actually spends with the child, and (c) a child's perception influences the long-term impact of fathering. The last point led the authors to develop the Father Involvement Scale, which reflects a retrospective inquiry of intergenerational fathering.

Over the years, there is a shift in paradigm of fatherhood and fathering. These changes are largely due to global transformations in various aspects of life, including the improved socioeconomic status of married women by elevated educational attainment and involvement in job sectors outside the home. Gradually, gendered family living that once depicted father as breadwinner and mother as full-time homemaker has been replaced by less specialized gender roles between spouses.

Determinants of Father Involvement

Research in Western societies has found that father involvement is influenced by various personal, relational, contextual, and child-related factors.

Intergenerational Fathering, Stress, and Self-Confidence

Parke (1995) recommends social learning theory as the backbone model in understanding fathering. In this theory, fathering is considered as a learning process that involves role modeling through observation (Bandura, 1969). As a process, fathering includes interactions with significant others in the life of the father where one's own parents may be the main source of reference. Parke further postulates that a high degree of paternal involvement with one's own children is significantly or strongly influenced by the positive and high level of involvement by one's own father. On the other hand, Sagi (1982) suggests that high involvement by a father may reflect his determination to compensate for poor involvement of his own father while growing up.

In accord with role-stress perspective on work–family interface, job-related stress has negative influence on paternal involvement (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Davis, Crouter, & McHale, 2006). Fathers who suffer from job-related pressure such as long working hours,

poor workplace support, and irregular work shifts have poor relationship with their children (Goodman, Crouter, Lanza, Cox, & Vernon-Feagans, 2011). In addition, self-confidence tends to lead to positive and high involvement of fathers (J. H. Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). This self-confidence may arise from the acquisition of hands-on skills and knowledge on parenting and child development. The socioeconomic status of fathers (England & Folbre, 2002) often provides them with resources to facilitate involvement. Talib and Yunos (2010) report that fathers of higher socioeconomic status are more involved in their children's lives and that their children perform better academically.

Marital Relationships, Maternal Support, and Father Involvement

The marital relationship, according to Belsky (1984), is one of the greatest determinants of fathering or parenting behavior. Marital quality is postulated to be highly influential on the psychosocial well-being of the father, thus affecting father-child interaction. In a longitudinal study by Frosch, Mangelsdorf, and McHale (2000), positive marital relationships have been found to be significantly associated with more secure father-child attachment. Marital intimacy, as reported by Bradford and Hawkins (2006), is one of the most critical dimensions of the marital relationship that also significantly relates with positive fathering behavior. Several studies have shown that marital conflict tends to damage father-child relationships more than mother-child relationships, which lend support to the fathering vulnerability hypothesis (e.g., Coiro & Emery, 1998; Frosch et al., 2000). Fathers who experience marital stress have been found to withdraw from their children (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989).

Mothers also play a role in influencing paternal involvement. Gaertner, Spinrad, Eisenberg, and Greving (2007) report that maternal protective attitudes reflective of gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Parke, 1995) tend to discourage father involvement during infancy. Marsiglio (1993) claims that fathers have equal roles as mothers, specifically as breadwinner, protector, nursemaid, friend, instiller of good values, discipline enforcer, teacher, and others that are equally tedious in terms of responsibilities. This supports the idea that the distribution of household chores in the present era is divided based on acceptance and specialization of the spouses (E. H. Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Yeung et al. (2001) report that fathers tend to be more involved with their children when their wives contribute a significant amount of income to the family's financial well-being. This implies a financial bargaining dynamics that may also occur in the household decision-making process.

Child Characteristics

Fathers prefer to bond with their sons shortly after birth (Lamb, 1977). However, empirical results about this preferential nature of father involvement according to the child's gender are mixed beyond infancy (e.g., Raley & Bianchi, 2006). As a developmental process, father involvement tends to differ across the life cycle according to the experiences of both child and father.

Malay Muslim Fathers' Involvement With Children

In a nationally representative study (National Board of Population and Family Development, Malaysia, 2009), it is reported that mothers communicate more with their children than fathers do. For fathers, topics on education, expenditures, friends, fashion, and style are major concerns and topics of discussion. About 84% of them never discuss any interpersonal relationship or sex-related topics with their children. The study concludes that fathers' lack of involvement with their children in such matters may lead to a lack of bonding between father and child, which, in turn, could lead to behavioral problems in the children.

Hossain et al. (2005) have found that Malay fathers in rural Peninsula Malaysia spend relatively less time than mothers in basic child care tasks. Another study by Hossain, Roopnarine, Ismail, Menon, and Sombuling (2007) on Kadazan parents in Malaysia report that fathers lag behind mothers in spending time caring for their infants.

In 1970, Wilder concluded from his observation of rural Malay fathers that fathers and adolescents, especially sons, tended to have poor relationships. Siraj (2007) notes that fathering in Islam relates highly with the leadership role, being strict, providing for the family, and enforcing discipline in children. According to the aforementioned authors, fathers are rarely seen as loving, communicative, or affectionate as mothers. A recent study (Rumaya & Lim, 2009) reveals that fathers who report high marital satisfaction and positive intergenerational fathering tend to exhibit positive fathering behavior.

Factors that influence father involvement in other parts of the world may also play significant roles in shaping fathers' involvement among Malay Muslims, with the exception that the processes may vary according to the values and norms of the Malay culture and Islamic religion. For Malay Muslims, bringing up a child is a responsibility that God entrusts to parents to fulfill both worldly and after-life purposes. Most important, the socialization process is based on the mission to guide the child to lead a good,

god-fearing life; to behave well; to be humble; and to be nice to others. In Islam, human development (in this context child development) is based on the concept of group efforts—*jama'ah*—where individualism and independence are promoted within a collective controlled environment and in which Islamic teachings serve as a guide for the whole socialization process.

Method

Data for this article are from a study titled “Fathering in Malaysia: Needs, Issues and Challenges,” funded by The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2007-2008). The study was carried out in the state of Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia. The Malays of Selangor comprise 52.9% of the population, followed by the Chinese (27.8%), Indians (13.3%), and others (6%). Being the most populated state with a total population of about five million, Selangor is one of the most advanced states in Malaysia with an 8.02 Human Development Index (United Nation Development Program, Malaysia, 2000). The mean monthly gross household income for Selangor in 2007 was RM 5580.00 (approximately US\$ 1743.75). Selangor, which neighbors Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, enjoys modern infrastructure and industrial development. As an employment hub for the country, the state population comprises people from all other states in Malaysia including both legal and illegal immigrants who migrate to the state for its wealth and employment opportunities.

The study respondents were identified through their school-going children aged 10 to 16 in both rural and urban areas of the state. Three districts in Selangor were randomly selected for the study. A multistage cluster sampling technique was employed in which two secondary and two primary public schools from each rural and urban areas were randomly selected. For each school, eight classes were selected, four from Form 1 classes (junior form, 7th-grade equivalent) and four from Form 4 (senior form, 10th-grade equivalent) classes. A similar procedure was used for the Standard 4 (4th-grade equivalent) and Standard 5 (5th-grade equivalent) classes for the primary schools. All children participating in the study were from intact families, which represent the majority family form in the country. After screening for eligibility, a total of 989 Malay Muslim fathers were finally involved in the study with 53% of them from rural areas in Selangor.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education of Malaysia. All Malay students from intact families in the selected classes

were given the questionnaire to bring home for their fathers to complete in 7 working days. Of a total of 1,440 questionnaires distributed with the help of class teachers, 210 were not returned. After checking for incompleteness ($n = 233$) and eligibility (based on marital duration), those fathers ($n = 8$) who reported being married for fewer number of years than the age of the focal child were considered ineligible (assuming they were not the biological fathers of the children). As such, 989 questionnaires were eligible for analysis (participation rate of 80.9%).

A demographic form was used to obtain data on the sociodemographic and economic background of the respondents while several established measures were translated, back-translated, adapted, and pilot tested. Cronbach alpha scores indicate that the instruments were reliable. These measures are described below.

Measures

Father involvement (G2—Generation 2). Data for father involvement with their biological child (G3—Generation 3) was measured with the adopted Father Involvement Scale, developed by Finley and Schwartz (2004). This scale, consisting of many retrospective questions, measured respondent's involvement as a biological father of the indexed child in 20 different domains of the child's life. The 20-item responses were based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *never involved* through 5 = *very involved*. The scale yielded a Cronbach alpha of .94. In addition, a Yes/No question was used to identify whether respondents wished to be more involved in their child's life (to replace the other measure on the same scale that aimed to identify types of activities that the respondents wished to be more involved in). Another open-ended question was included to identify areas that the respondents wished to be more involved in, in their child's life.

Own father involvement (G1—Generation 1). The same Father Involvement Scale was reworded and used to measure respondents' own father involvement in the same 20 different domains of life while they were growing up. Only reported involvement of one's biological father was used. Those whose biological fathers were not available due to death, divorce, or separation did not respond to this measure and were excluded from the analysis. This scale had a Cronbach alpha of .95.

Marital quality. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986) was used to measure marital quality of the respondents. The three items on respondents' global evaluation of their marital satisfaction were measured against a 7-point Likert-type scale. A high score on the scale

indicated high satisfaction with one's marriage, thus implying good marital quality. The scale had a Cronbach alpha of .95.

Job satisfaction. A one-item question with 7-point Likert-type scale of degree of satisfaction (1 = *least satisfied*, 7 = *highly satisfied*) was included to measure the respondent's satisfaction with his current job.

Stress. A 14-item Perceived Stress Scale measuring overall perceived stress in one's life developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) was used to measure the fathers' perception of their stress level for the month prior to data collection. A sample of items from the scale included the following: (a) In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? (b) In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? The scale had a Cronbach alpha of .77, measured using a 5-point scale (0 = *never*, 4 = *very often*).

Self-confidence. A one-item question with a 7-point scale (1 = *least confident*, 7 = *highly confident*) of degree of self-confidence was used to measure respondents' general self-confidence.

Demographics. Background characteristics such as age, education, occupation, and income of respondents and their spouses were collected in the survey.

Analysis Strategy

We conduct descriptive and multivariate analyses to address the research objectives. The original scores on the main variables are used in bivariate and multivariate analyses and mean values are used to categorize the respondents into high, low, and moderate categories for descriptive purposes. Relationships between the respondents' characteristics (age, education, income, stress level, and self-confidence), contextual factors (own father involvement, marital satisfaction, job satisfaction, marital duration, number of children, wife's education and earnings, and family income), and child characteristics (age, gender) are explored. Multivariate analysis is performed to determine the unique predictors of father involvement.

Results

Table 1 describes the characteristics of our sample. The adult respondents are between 30 and 60 years, with a mean age of 44.4 years. More than half of the fathers are between 41 and 50 years. The respondents obtained an average of 12.6 years of education, with 34.7% of them holding university degrees. The respondents earn an average of RM 3068.52 monthly

(approximately US\$ 1000.00), with an average family income of RM 4058.03 (US\$ 1,350.00). They have been married for an average of 18 years, whereas more than 60% of them have been married for at least 15 years. The average number of children is 4.2, with almost 19.0% having more than 5 children. For the focal children, 43% are boys, and their ages range between 10 and 17 years with an average age of 12.4 years. A total of 31.5% of the children are first-borns. As for the mothers, the average age is 40.8 years, with about half of them aged 40 years and less. About 52% have obtained secondary school education, and 26.1% are university graduates. A total of 60% are full-time housewives, and of those earning a monthly income ($n = 341$), the average monthly income is RM 2932.19 (approximately US\$ 950.00).

Level of Father Involvement and Perceived Own Father Involvement

As indicated by Finley and Schwartz (2004), the Father Involvement Scale employs phenomenological perceptions of the child (in this study, the respondent) on his own father's involvement. Similar items in the scale are used to reflect respondents' perceptions of their own level of involvement with the focused child.

Table 2 reports the mean scores of the items in the Father Involvement Scale for both self-involvement as a father and perceived level of own father's involvement with them when they were young. There is a rank order among these items that is quite consistent in the two sets of scores. Fathers are most highly involved in helping their children develop responsibilities and in caregiving, providing income, advising, disciplining, and nurturing a child's spiritual development. They are least involved in leisure, fun, play, and sharing activities with their children. This finding implies the following possibilities: (a) less direct involvement of fathers with children beyond middle childhood; (b) fathers engage in indirect involvement rather than in "providing," "disciplining," or "advising"; and (c) feelings and emotional involvement that may manifest through sharing of activities are not common in the culture. Despite the consistent rank order, t tests reveal that the levels of involvement between the two generations are significantly different. The differences in the grand means of all items ($\text{Involvement}_{G2} = 82.54$; $\text{Involvement}_{G1r} = 79.70$) reflect the gap between the two generations and the shifted paradigm of fatherhood and fathering over time with fathers becoming more involved in children's lives in recent years.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents and the Focused Child (N = 989)

Variables	n	%	Mean	SD
Respondent's age, years (N = 989)			44.43	5.68
30-40	269	27.2		
41-50	578	58.4		
>50	142	14.4		
Spouse's age, years (N = 910)			40.78	5.49
≤35	160	17.6		
36-45	579	63.6		
>45	171	18.8		
Respondent's education (N = 970)			12.59 years	3.96
No formal education	11	1.1		
Primary school	72	7.4		
High school	425	43.8		
Diploma/certificate/HSC	125	12.9		
Tertiary level and beyond	337	34.8		
Spouse's education (N = 942)			12.07 years	3.54
No formal education	9	1.0		
Primary school	65	6.9		
High school	489	51.9		
Diploma/certificate/HSC	127	13.5		
Tertiary level and beyond	252	26.7		
Monthly income				
Own (n = 907)	—	—	RM 3068.52	RM 2959.11
Spouse (n = 341)	—	—	RM 2932.19	RM 2329.40
Family (n = 921)	—	—	RM 4058.03	RM 3860.83
Marital duration (N = 927)			17.66 years	5.14
≤15 years	363	39.2		
16-25 years	487	52.5		
>25 years	77	8.3		
Number of children (N = 979)			4.23	1.59
≤3	349	35.6		
4-5	441	45.1		
>5	189	19.7		
Minimum = 1, maximum = 11				
Gender of focal child (N = 989)				
Boy	430	43.5		
Girl	559	56.6		
Age of focal child (N = 989)			12.37	2.23
<13 years	526	53.2		
≥13 years	463	46.8		

Table 2. Mean Values for Items in Father Involvement Scale

Items	Perceived Own Father's Involvement, Mean (SD)	Respondents' Involvement as a Father, Mean (SD)
Intellectual development	3.54 (1.09)	3.96 (0.91)
Emotional development	3.52 (1.06)	3.85 (0.88)
Social development	3.63 (1.07)	3.95 (0.93)
Ethical/moral development	3.93 (1.00)	4.18 (0.87)
Spiritual development	4.14 (0.95)	4.33 (0.80)
Physical development	3.65 (0.97)	3.93 (0.90)
Career development	3.59 (1.09)	4.02 (0.92)
Developing responsibilities	4.16 (0.91)	4.39 (0.72)
Developing independence	4.07 (0.95)	4.28 (0.78)
Developing competence	3.78 (0.98)	4.05 (0.85)
Leisure, fun, and play	3.27 (1.12)	3.69 (0.98)
Providing income	4.18 (0.98)	4.45 (0.79)
Sharing activities/interests	3.26 (1.14)	3.67 (0.96)
Mentoring/teaching	3.55 (1.15)	3.88 (0.96)
Caregiving	4.27 (0.92)	4.48 (0.76)
Being protective	4.42 (0.85)	4.61 (0.66)
Advising	4.33 (0.89)	4.50 (0.71)
Disciplining	4.29 (0.89)	4.47 (0.72)
Guidance for school/ homework	3.57 (1.10)	3.90 (0.93)
Companionship	3.52 (1.15)	3.85 (1.02)
Mean (SD)	79.70 (14.70)	82.54 (11.63)

Note. The reported Father Involvement Scale is scored based on a 5-point Likert-type scale measuring degree of involvement ranging from 5 = *Always involved* to 1 = *Never involved*. The *t* test indicates significant differences between the two scores ($t = -13.34, p \leq .001$) where fathers report a higher score on their own involvement (G1) as compared with own father's involvement (G2).

The responses to the open-ended question indicate that about 64% of the respondents wish that they could be more involved in their child's life. Some of the areas that they wish to be more involved in include wanting to be able to guide the child religiously, being the child's "friend," and encouraging and mentoring the child to be academically successful. The focus on religious teaching is quite obvious, wherein 53% state that they want their child to be a religious and holistically developed individual and 32.4% report

academic achievement as the second important factor of the socialization goal. Providing for the child is a religious duty along with other religious rituals such as praying together, reciting Quran, and fasting. Teaching by role modeling of good behavior such as respecting God's human and nonhuman creations, filial piety, helping others, and being courteous are not only religious but also very Malay in nature. The fathers also report time as a factor limiting their opportunities to be involved, along with a lack of self-competence in helping the child in his or her academic-related activities. Focusing on academic achievement is also considered Islamic, since the religion also encourages knowledge seeking among its followers. The findings also reveal that respondents' perception of their level of involvement in various aspects of the child's life is similar to their perception of their own father's level of involvement.

Bivariate Analysis

Pearson correlations show the bivariate relationships between self factors, contextual factors, and child characteristics with father involvement measured as the mean of the 20 items. Strong, positive, and significant relationships are seen through father's marital satisfaction ($r = .35$) and through the influence of own father involvement ($r = .53$) on respondents' self-involvement as fathers. Moderate and positive relationships are found between father's education ($r = .20$) and job satisfaction ($r = .21$) with father involvement. Fathers who are more educated and those who report high job satisfaction also report a higher level of involvement with their children. In addition, significant but weak relationships are found between other contextual factors and self factors and father involvement. All the aforementioned findings are in accord with previous studies (Feldman, 2000; Lu et al., 2010; Rusell & Hwang, 2004; Yeung et al., 2001). The negative relationships between child's age, number of children, and marital duration show that fathers of younger children and those with fewer numbers of children tend to be more involved with their children. Gender of the child plays no significant role in father involvement, consistent with findings reported by previous researchers (Finley & Schwartz, 2007; Snarey, 1993).

Multivariate Analysis

To further understand what factors significantly affect fathers' involvement, multiple regression analysis is conducted. The dependent variable is a scale formed by taking the total score of responses on the 20 father involvement items. Table 3 reports these results.

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients for Regression Model Predicting Father Involvement

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients	
	β	SE
Constant	31.798	4.848
Area (0 = rural, 1 = urban)	1.307	0.749
Age	0.025	0.097
Education (years)	0.457***	0.136
Family income	-3.507×10^{-5}	0.000
Child's gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	-0.136	0.698
Child's age	-0.231	0.164
Job satisfaction	0.213	0.298
Self-confidence	0.112	0.163
Stress level	0.002	0.038
Marital satisfaction	0.564***	0.092
Own father involvement	0.391***	0.026
Spouse's age	0.050	0.097
Spouse's education (years)	0.002	0.152
Spouse's employment (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.468	0.855
Number of children	-0.447*	0.227
$R^2 = .42$		
$F(15, 625) = 30.33***$		

*** $p \leq .001$.

The analyses reveal four significant predictors of father involvement, including own father involvement, marital quality, respondents' educational level, and number of children. Results indicate an R^2 of .42, which means that the independent variables significantly predict 42% of the variance in fathers' involvement. Malay Muslim fathers who perceive their own fathers to have been highly involved in raising them, who experience high marital satisfaction, who are better educated, and who have fewer children tend to be more involved in their children's lives. These findings are in line with previous related studies (Feldman, 2000; Rusell & Hwang, 2004). The strength of own father's involvement as a predictor implies that past experiences serve as an important platform for these males to become more involved with their own children, reflecting the influence of social learning. Enjoying satisfactory marital relationships also enhances father involvement while being more educated possibly opens up ways for fathers to be more involved in their

child's activities. Having fewer children also encourages fathers to spend more time in activities with each child.

Family income, wife's employment status, level of mental stress, father's satisfaction with their jobs, and their confidence are not significantly associated with how involved a father is in his children's lives when other variables are held constant.

Conclusion

The main purpose of our study is to examine the relationships between self factors, contextual factors, and child characteristics with father involvement among Malay Muslims in Malaysia. The findings reveal that the fathers' perceptions of their own fathers' involvement when they were growing up and marital satisfaction are the two main predictors of father involvement. The concept of intergenerational fathering in this study reflects the role modeling and observation concepts from social learning theory. Positive experiences with own fathers may serve as motivation for these fathers to be active in their children's lives. It is worth noting that fathers (G2) report higher levels of involvement with their own children (G3) than their own fathers (G1) were with them. This difference may signify the influence of social transitions. The similarity in activities that the respondents perceive both themselves and their own fathers to be highly involved in signifies intergenerational fathering. The role of marital satisfaction as a significant predictor in the current study supports findings of Belsky (1984) and Frosch et al. (2000), who mention the importance of marital relationships as a context for functional parenting. Fathers who enjoy satisfactory marriages tend to be more involved with their children, implying a state of familial tranquility that welcomes more positive interactions with family members.

As found in other cultures, fathers with higher education participate more in various activities in their children's life. Being more educated might render such fathers more open and accepting, thus inviting the child to include him in his or her activities. In addition, having fewer children allows fathers more time to spend with each child. The results show that the average number of children for each respondent was 4.3, with the average age of the first child being 16.5 years and the youngest child 7.4 years. At this stage of family life, having fewer children creates opportunities for both father and child to be highly involved with each other. Most fathers aspire to be more involved, especially in trying to shape the character, morality, spirituality, and intellectual development of their children.

The aforementioned findings shed light on factors that contribute to father involvement among Malay Muslims. In general, there is no marked difference in factors that influence father involvement among Malay Muslim fathers as compared with their counterparts elsewhere. This may be due to several notable limitations of the study. The cross-sectional design inhibits examination of the influence of multiple predictors over time. Two variables, namely, level of job satisfaction and self-confidence, use single-item measures. Furthermore, information on fathers' involvement with their children (G2) and their own father's (G1) involvement with them, when they were young, were reported by the same informant. Therefore, same informant bias may have influenced the magnitude of the relationship of the variables. There is no direct measure on the Malay cultural aspect or the "religious" aspect of fathering to permit a detailed examination of how they shape fatherhood ideology and behavior. However, findings from the open-ended questions highlight the desire of many of the fathers to be more involved in raising their children according to the teachings of Islam, in order for the child to become a useful adult who can contribute to his religion, community, and nation.

This study notes the influences of self, interpersonal, and contextual factors on Muslim fathers' involvement. For Muslims, a good father can be understood as one who is able to perform all the responsibilities of bringing up a child. Our study highlights the concern of Muslim fathers in performing their roles for the benefit of the future of their children in this world and thereafter. Perhaps, one's degree of religiosity may be examined to better explain the nature of father involvement. The intent to become good and involved fathers is evident from the study but lack of time for involvement seems to be the barrier.

Future studies should examine the details on the roles of religion and culture on father involvement, intergenerational fathering, marital relationships, maternal support and encouragement, and other sociopsychological factors such as gender-role orientation that may increase level of paternal involvement. In-depth interviews on meaning of fathering and the different activities that fathers actually engage in with their children will enrich our understanding in this area.

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