

Research Brief



“HAVE YOU HEARD ME TODAY?” FATHERS SPEAK!

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

For the sake of effective contribution of men and boys towards gender equality and elimination of gender based violence; there is a need for understanding and exploring the existing perceptions of fathers about masculinities, their role as fathers in child development, family settings and eradicating gender based violence.

This qualitative research study is envisaged to produce an initial analysis along with recommendations to contribute to the existing knowledge base. The findings are expected to contribute in two ways, firstly by informing the existing body of evidence and secondly by providing information

to Trocaire and partners about programming through the provision of specific strategies. Additionally, the research findings are expected to provide evidence to the partners for advocacy especially in the area of engaging fathers to address gender based violence at the relevant provincial, national and other forums.

This research brief is based on the results of the report entitled, **“HAVE YOU HEARD ME TODAY?” FATHERS SPEAK!**, which was produced with support from Trocaire and its Partner Organizations from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

OBJECTIVES

To

- Assess Father’s Perceptions of Masculinities and the construction of masculine ideology;
- Explore Father’s role in child development in regard to gender justice and dissemination of attributes i.e. reconstruction of masculine attributes;
- Assess understanding of fathers about GBV’s linkages with practices of masculinity, and child development;
- Develop / Recommend Strategies to engage fathers as leaders to eliminate GBV at family and society level.

FINDINGS

The nexus between Fatherhood, Masculinities, Child Development and GBV

There was an overwhelming agreement on the fact that the girls and women are most of the victims of gender based violence in the family and society. Male participants of group discussions enlisted numerous forms of violence observed generally in families. These forms included deprivation of daughters and wife's rights, use of abusive language to the sons, daughters and wives, and sometimes physical torture.

The communities' depiction of the characteristics of a "real man" clearly showed the reflections of prevailed notions of masculinity in society, as most of the men link attributes of being real men to being strong, brave, decisive, provider and protector.

"Demonstration of such masculine characteristics are firmly associated to the honor of man, and inability to demonstration and adherence to masculine characteristics made him a feminine man, which is ridiculous and unacceptable in Pashtun society" (Grandfather, Daman-e-Koh, Mardan).

Further discussions revealed that societal influence played a crucial role to shape the attitudes of men as fathers, and most of the times it led to negative practices, which not only harm men as fathers but their children and wives as well.

It was discussed that patriarchal societies are formed on the foundations of power differences, and these foundations are strengthened by beneficiaries of patriarchy. The male discussants reflected their contributions in strengthening of power differences. Majority of the male discussants justified the prevailed power differences among men and women as natural and based on biological differences,

"Man is physically and mentally stronger than woman, therefore he holds more power" (Shopkeeper, Mardan).



Some of the male participants stated links between power differences while others believed that power differences were not the reason of gender based violence,

"Powers held by man assures justice in the family" (Father, Swat).

Perceptions

Fathers own perceptions about being appreciated by family and society clearly indicated towards the demonstration of masculine attributes that are brave, strong, decision makers and controllers as mentioned by the community.

"A father is a shepherd and family is his flock, he has to take care of all, has to control, protect and feed them" (Farmer, Tando Jam).

Fathers being head of the household are not considered to be helping females in domestic chores. The prevailed perceptions about fathers role is to engage in provision to the family while nurturing, cooking, cleaning etc. are assigned to the females. Many of the participant fathers were in the opinion that social traditions, culture, values and norms play an important role in shaping and adaptation of segregated gender roles

***“If a father can not provide basic needs or can not maintain discipline in family, he is not believed to be a good father and criticized by society”.
(Executive Director-SDS)***

Practices;

Dilemmas of Fatherhood in Practice

Practices of Father	Impact
Power imbalance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women given less importance in decision making • Women are made submissive • Communication gap in relations based on superiority • Prevalence of illiteracy in society specifically in women and girls
Challenges in meeting expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal expectations result in mental stress • Men are reluctant in showing emotions • Men become more violent against women to overcome their shame
Misinterpretation of religious teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricts mobility • Exploited to defend men’s supremacy over women and girls

Dilemmas of Traditional Fatherhood	
Perceived Attributes of Father	Impact
Economic provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and emotional frustration • Communication gap • Source of tension and conflict in families • Mother as sole nurturers
Protector of the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of security and belonging amongst family members • Socially confident children • Frustration and anxiety if expectations are not fulfilled • Over protection can adversely affect individual’s growth • Can restrict women/girls mobility
Custodian of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong social network • Expectation to maintain strong hold in relationships • Decision making capacity in the hands of males only • Societal pressure and anxiety if you fail
Distinctive roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less emotional attachment in a family setting • Lesser domestic work sharing • Less opportunities for women/girls
Societal pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unjust decision-making • Reduction of available choices • Leads to physical violence • Conflict within families

The involvement of fathers in the domestic chores is limited as the economic provision is considered to be the major responsibility for men, additionally societal pressure also restricts them to engage in domestic work,

“If a man will stay home and take care of his children, then who will earn bread?” (Driver, Petaro, Jamshoro).

Power imbalances are largely practiced in both of the provinces, fathers and grandfather have the power of final decisions for their families; other major influence on their decisions is of their tribes and relatives,

“Being lesser exposed to world, women are unable to make better decisions” (Grandfather, Hashim Malah, Matiari).

Fathers practice differently in raising their sons and daughters as they believe that both genders need different set of skills for their future lives. There is a strong impact of relatives and neighbors interference in an individual family’s decisions particularly in rural settings, where strong cohesion does not allow deviating from traditional patterns.

The inspirations are different for a son and daughter because of the varied expectations of the society from them. Son is inspired by the masculine characteristics of his father as he



For Government and Legislators

- New educational material should be developed to orient new couples on parenthood. Mutual decision making should be encouraged at household level. This could be achieved by effective advocacy at provincial and national level.
- Implementation of laws and policies for women rights shall be ensured by government executives.
- Income generating opportunities with technical support should be introduced by government at rural levels to reduce the economic frustration of fathers.



sees his future role as a father. Similarly, a daughter is more close to the mother so she usually follows her and learns how to manage the domestic work.

Call for Action Program Level;

- Mobilizing fathers for policy and legal reform in favor of children and women is essential to create environment free of violence. This needs consistent engagement of fathers to the intervention program. Advocates should also appeal to lawmakers on a personal level, as husbands, partners and fathers.
- Integrating male-targeted activities into ongoing programs should be considered essential to approach gender equality and violence free society. This involvement will produce a sense of ownership among the men which can also increase involvement of women to empower themselves against gender based violence and create awareness among their peers.
- A key operational question to address is how to help men find non-violent ways of expressing frustration and learn to share the domestic work, child rearing and provider role. Facilitating communication between family members is crucial. Partners with experience in family counseling should be identified and mobilized and further research in this area should be supported.
- Work must be done in communities to identify positive role models which are culturally and socially attractive for parents and to determine effective ways to nurture and promote them in the society.

AMAL means action in Urdu. Started in 1994 as a youth-focused HIV and AIDS action group, today AMAL is one of the most visible advocates for prevention, treatment and awareness in Pakistan. For the purpose of tackling the HIV and AIDS and GBV issues, AMAL focuses to understand and work with different types of masculinities. AMAL's expertise lie in three major areas, including; Research, Capacity Building and Advocacy. (www.amal-hdn.org.pk)