

Fatherhood

Research Bulletin *Special Edition*

Australian Fatherhood Research Network Bulletin 49 February 2020

Fatherhood in Southeast Asia



Special Bulletin Editorial Team: A/Prof Shefaly Shorey, National University of Singapore and A/Prof Richard Fletcher, University of Newcastle. Layout by Miranda Cashin.

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NEWS

AUSTRALIAN FATHERHOOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

Deakin University campus in central Melbourne May 7th and 8th 2020

The fifth annual Australian Fatherhood Research Symposium is co-hosted by the Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle and the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development, Deakin University. The 2020 Symposium will be hosted in Melbourne, and is open to researchers, practitioners and policy makers involved with fathers.



AFRC

AUSTRALIAN FATHERHOOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM 2020
May 7th - 8th | Melbourne

Deakin Downtown
TOWER 2 LEVEL 12/727 COLLINS ST.
MELBOURNE VIC 3008

The Symposium is under the auspices of the Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle and The Centre for Social and Early Development, Deakin University.





 | @ausfatherhood | #AFRS2020

Join us on to hear about the latest research in Australian fatherhood, including key note presentations, interactive workshops, panel discussions, poster presentations and networking opportunities.

We are excited to invite leading experts in the field of fatherhood to give key note presentations across both days of the symposium. Professor Alistair Thomson, who is currently leading an ARC Linkage research project about the history of fatherhood in Australia, will be presenting on '*Fatherhood in 20th Century Australia: Learning From History.*' Internationally renowned men's health expert Professor Philip Morgan will also be presenting on '*Father-Child Activity and Play.*' All other presenters will be announced at a later date. Keep an eye on the [webpage](#) for program updates.

Researchers and organisations who work with fathers are encouraged to submit an abstract for a poster presentation. We aim to build effective collaborations so that we may further the evidence base on fathering.

Refreshments and lunch will be provided both days. Registration is essential.

Key Dates:

March 6th 2020 - Abstract submissions close

April 26th 2020 - Registrations close

[Click here](#) or go to <http://mapprosearch.org/fatherhood-symposium-2020> for more information about the event, registrations and abstract submissions.

THE FUTURE OF THE FATHERHOOD RESEARCH BULLETIN

This issue, the 49th, will be the last Bulletin to be produced by the team based at the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle. There are a number of changes among staff. Jody has left the University, Miranda has moved to Sydney, Jaime is concentrating on finishing her PhD and I have decided to pull back from the editorial role. In my case, my employment has changed to a 'research-only' contract which means that all my salary and on-costs must be paid from grants. As well, I now have a granddaughter so I wish to spend less time thinking about fathers and more time being 'Poppa'.

The Editorial group that has supported the production of the FRB will be leading the discussion of the next phase of the Bulletin at the fifth annual Australian Fatherhood Research Symposium in May this year in Melbourne (see details on page 3). It is time for a new model, not just of identifying suitable content and editing but of financing the production of the Bulletin. It may be that producing four or five Bulletins a year is not feasible and so the style and reach may need to change to one where an FRB subscription is charged or crowd funding is sought. The Editorial group is keen to keep the Bulletin alive, so we will update you on the outcome of discussions in Issue 50.

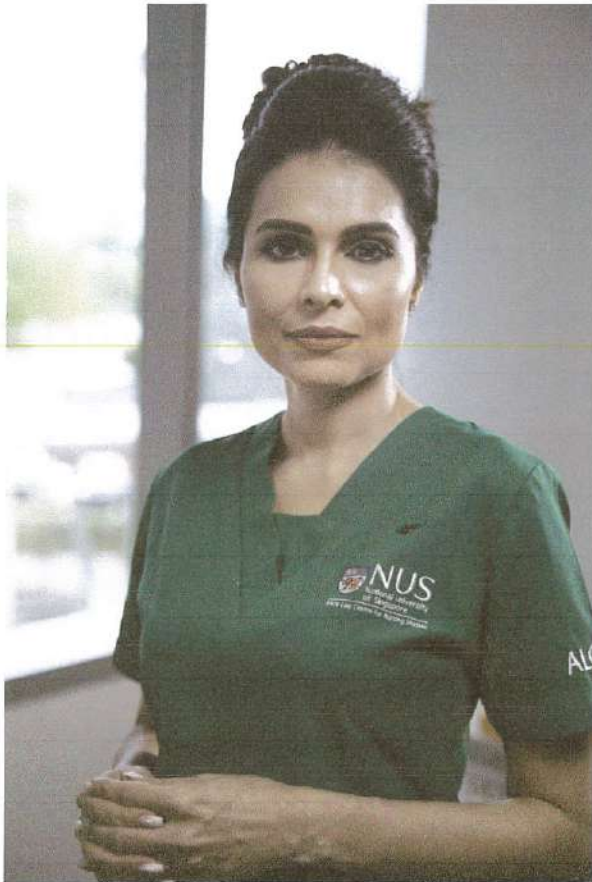
Richard Fletcher, on behalf of the Editorial Group

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL EDITION ON FATHERHOOD IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The geographical world region Southeast Asia comprises of 11 countries including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam (UN, 2012). This region constitutes 10.5% of Asia and 3% of the earth's total land area, about 8.5% of the total world's population (Population of Asia, 2018). The countries in this region varied widely in terms of cultural diversity, socio-cultural beliefs, levels of development, demographic profiles and political systems. Though strong family ties and kinship are some of the common trends seen in Asian societies however with globalization, urbanization, immigration policies and a shift to more egalitarian couple relationship worldwide, there is a growing expectation of involved fatherhood in Asia especially in Southeast Asia.

Expectations of the paternal role have now been shifted from a sole bread-winner to a role no different than that of a maternal role as fathers are expected to be involved in the family care activities. The ultra-low fertility rate in Southeast Asia, especially in countries like Singapore and Thailand, has motivated governments to introduce pro-natalist policies such as the introduction of paternity leave, monetary benefits for parents having two or more kids and child-care subsidies.

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These efforts have shed a light on contemporary fatherhood where fathers are expected to be more engaged beyond their provider's role. Researchers from high-income countries have highlighted the need of capturing these changing notions of fatherhood within their specific cultural contexts. It will be important to track these changes in Southeast Asia where traditional gender norms such as strict father and nurturing mother, a preference for a male child, and a highly gendered domestic division of labor remain deeply entrenched. Fatherhood in Southeast Asia is also shaped by religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, which promote patriarchy that may result in different meanings and practices of fatherhood, as well as how others view the paternal role. Practices common in Southeast Asia, such as the hiring of domestic helpers and living with extended families to cater for childcare, mark the differences between this region unique and its Western counterparts. As such, there is a need to understand fatherhood and the types of resources available for fathers in Southeast Asia to create awareness about fatherhood from this part of the world.

Dr Shefaly Shorey

Assistant Professor, Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore

PROGRAMS AND FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

FRB Comment: For this Special Edition Dr Storey contacted colleagues across South East Asia to prepare a brief report on the situation of programs and support for fathers in each country.

Fatherhood in Brunei

In Brunei, fatherhood roles are highly influenced by the philosophy Melayu Islam Beraja living (Malay Islamic Monarchy). The Malay culture and Islamic religion engrained the fatherhood support that exist naturally in the country ecosystem. The fatherhood support first and foremost embraced within the family members, priority being those of the same gender.

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The support extends to close relative including parents, uncles, aunties, first cousin as well as grandparents, before it extends to close friends. The role of wife in acknowledging the contribution of fatherhood is seen as meaningful to the husband, especially in terms of psychosocial support such as words and action of encouragement. There is also Parentcraft education available in the maternal and child health clinics across the whole country in preparation for fatherhood. To date, there are no Non Governmental Organization that advocate fatherhood support, except such as that may be accessible through social media, for example Facebook and Instagram.

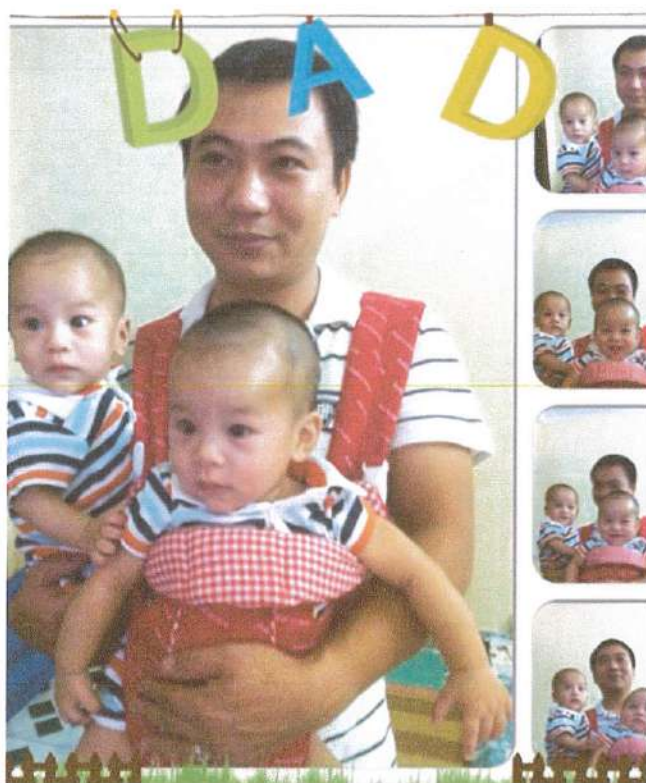


As far as healthcare professionals are concerned, Midwives and Doctors in the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinics play important roles as sources of knowledge for developing fatherhood in Brunei. Knowledge and reaffirmation is often sought during MCH appointments. Recently there has been specific interest on Men's health in Brunei where a roadshow to advocate for men's health has been initiated by Assistant Professor Dr Deeni from Institute of Health Sciences Universiti Brunei Darussalam, however, this is not specific to Fatherhood. Men's roles in childbirth, specifically pregnancy loss, was also recently studied by Dr. Khadizah and Dr. Sarena in the same Institute since 2017. In 2020, they will be conducting research on fathers' different roles that include how fathers can contribute to compliance with children's immunization, monitoring screen time among children above 6 months old, adherence with postnatal check ups, home visits and antenatal education.

The father is seen as a responsible person in Brunei as stated in the Islamic religion that ideally be breadwinner for the family ensuring food, clothing, shelter, safety and other basic needs of his family. A father protects his family in terms of maintaining family dignity, shaping children's behaviours and overall offers a role model for the family. Fatherhood is a challenging journey for a man having children in Brunei, be it biologically born or adopted. Most fatherhood skills are acquired from learning through religion, and the Malay culture (including help from family, close relative, friend and society). Other than that, professional advices may be sought from healthcare professionals. A father is seen as the most knowledgeable in the family, protecting family and ensuring family safety, a source of reference and decision making.

Dr. Khadizah Haji Abdul Mumin

Fatherhood in Vietnam



In Vietnam, we do not have yet any available resources for fathers. Like other countries, we think that we need the services to support fathers in Vietnam. There are many reasons for having these services in Vietnam. First reason is fathers foster spirit, he is a caretaker and also teaches children about the spirit of discipline. There are many studies showing that the more affectionate, mentally supportive and caring a father is, the more he can help children become more aware, have better language skills and develop social relationships faster. In addition, it will help to make significant progress in their ability to acquire knowledge, internal power and to realize happiness, self-esteem and conviction in themselves. The second reason is that fathers affect their children through their relationship. The first relationship a child has with a parent will affect all of the child's relationships throughout his life, including those with friends and loved ones. Interacting with the father will be the launching pad for the child's future engagement. It not only helps the child identify who he or she is, what role he plays in the relationships, but also gives the child a keen sense of how he is loved and accepted. Girls will look

for a model of a man like their good father, and they can easily do that because the reflexes to look for the familiar already exist. If a father is kind, loving and polite, a girl's role model will approach those standards. The boys reflect on their father's model, especially their father's characteristic traits. If the father is in a habit of being aggressive, likes to control, their sons will imitate unconsciously. People are highly socialized, easily imitating behaviors. The first personality role models give children a framework for children to feel about themselves and develop themselves. The fourth reason is the father can make changes in the role of the family. Currently only 20% of families in the US have both parents (married) living with their children. The remaining are open-structure families with separated or divorced parents and children living with either of them, or the parent's family, either female or male. As such, fathers in the family may be fathers living with their mothers, single dads, divorced fathers, gay dads, foster dads, step dads, dads at home not working ... How important is the father affecting his child? In fact, the role of women in the labor market has changed the way society views the traditional role of fathers and mothers. Today, up to 60% of women go to work. According to research by the Human Development and Child Health Organization (NICHD), fathers have never been as interested in child care as they are now. There may be many different reasons but in general it is because the mother goes to work more, the father balances work and housework more, cares about his psychological awareness and his members more, realizes that he is more connected with his children...Children who have strong and deep attachment to their fathers have less problems with behavioral disorders and actively avoid stimulants. According to the survey, the less interested father, the more likely the child is likely to leave school early, face many problems related to attitudes and violence. Researchers have shown that fathers play as important a role as mothers in being caregivers, guardians, financial supporters and, most importantly, role models. In many cases, if the father does not live with the children, the rope that links the father will not break. Father can still play a role model and be a spiritual fulcrum for example showing "I really want to spend time with you". In Vietnamese culture, the family is one of the important component in society. Nowadays, this opinion seem to be overshadowed. Therefore, we need to be supported by the available resources for father to improve the significant view of Vietnamese people.

Dr Nguyen Thi Minh Chinh, RN, PhD. Director of Pre-clinical Practice Center, Namdinh University of Nursing,
Email: nguyenminhchinhshd@gmail.com

Fatherhood in Cambodia

A father is the male parent of a child. Besides the paternal bonds of a father to his children, the father may have a parental legal and social relationship with the child that carries with it certain rights and obligations, although this varies between jurisdictions. A biological father may have legal obligations to a child not raised by him, such as an obligation of monetary support.

Fathers play significant roles in their children's growth and development. In Cambodia, fathers have a huge impact on their children



and on the society. When fathers are directly and personally involved in their children's lives as early as possible, the children will learn better and grow up to be healthier and happier human beings. Fathers tend to supervise the importance of their presence in their children's lives, often choosing to focus on working for their future. A number of fathers do not know that their absenteeism poses a great influence on the children's well-being, both mentally and physically.

Some people suggest that effectual fathering should have seven characteristics including fostering a positive relationship with the children's mother, spending time with children, nurturing children, disciplining children appropriately, serving as a guide to the outside world, protecting and providing, serving as a positive role model. Fathers may not excel in all seven dimensions, but fathers who do well in most of them will serve their children and families well.

Nevertheless, it's a common misunderstanding that the father's sole responsibility to the family is merely, to be the worker for the family. In most families, fathers play an important role to make financial incomes to support his wife and his children; and more often than not, Cambodian fathers become so busy with their works that the mothers are left alone to take care of the children and the household. However, there are no perfect parents, every parent has weaknesses that go together with strengths. Let's take a quick look at some common parenting weaknesses. There are some issues that fathers may respond to fast, first, losing temper too quickly, which is replacing anger from other circumstances on to their child. Second, commanding their child, which may be perceived as not respecting their child, therefore, child may not feel that they have a mind of her or his own. Third, father controlling all the time, this act may influence their personal needs, thoughts, feelings. Last, father lacks respectfulness, which may lead the child to use foul language and she or he may act rudely.

In addition to that, I am most likely to say that our children are like mirrors, they may reflect father behaviors and habits daily. Therefore, some supporting services to help fathers play up their strengths, role modeling, which is strengthening their weaknesses. For example, during Father's Day in June, UNICEF initiated a "Super Dads" campaign in recognition of the significant role fathers play in their children's growth and development. Second, Investing in Children and their Societies (ICS) organized a seminar to help fathers when they were scared with small babies, because they may not have been involved with their babies during the first 6-12 month after birth. In another activity, ICS invited participants to join a training, which was designed to help parents better raise their children in positive ways. In governmental hospitals, before and during labor room, fathers have been trained by midwife in terms of caring for their baby and supporting mother after discharge from the hospital.

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In sum, it has found that children growing up without direct close interaction with fathers struggle with behavioral problems, mental disorders, poor academic performance, violence and drug abuse. In a more general sense, effective fathers should care for their children and present a model of good behavior. In this regard, the supporting services to fatherhood is much importance in order to promote father's strengths and role modellings.

Dr. Koy Virya, RN, MNsc., MHPed., PhD, Deputy Director of Department of Hospital Services, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Email: virya2403koy@gmail.com

Fatherhood in Indonesia



Many health efforts in Indonesia are carried out with the commitment of mothers. Systematic efforts have been carried out nationally since the 1970s under the leadership of President Suharto. Some formal and informal organizations that facilitate mothers are established, such as cadre groups, PKK (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, Group for family welfare), Dharma Wanita (The wives of government's employees), and so on. The activity for this group of mothers could cover various fields such as use of traditional medicine, courses to increase the family income, monthly meeting for guest lecture, and so on. Immunization and other basic health activities are also helped by these groups.

Recent studies have found that the father or husband is central in family decision making, including in health matters. No matter how high the education level of mothers and how rich the economic condition of the mothers, the final decision remains in the hands of the fathers. This finding is found in the majority of family studies published in Indonesia. In the literature, similar things also found in various countries, like in Africa.

This finding was not predicted previously. During these decades, the attention to the group of fathers was not great. Compared to activities for mothers, the program for fathers is minimal. Based on this phenomenon, a proposal by academics at University Airlangga was submitted to the regional government and also the government at the national level, especially for those engaged in the health sector, to begin discussing the role of the father. In other words, it is hoped that there will be a movement for making formal and informal forums for fathers, especially those in rural areas, which are the largest community group in Indonesia. The groups can cover villages, or maybe sub-districts and districts. The concept can also discuss the existing models that occur in mothers. Some real programs can be created, but the main goal remains to facilitate knowledge, improve the ability of fathers, and become a venue for exchanging experiences. It is hoped that this forum can change the decision of the father, who maybe does not allow the participation of his family in several health programs. The group can also be used to improve the quality of knowledge and attitudes. Hopefully, for the purpose of funding and technical assistant, the program will be initiated by the government.

While government-formed organisations are not available, fathers' associations in the private sectors can also be used. In Indonesia, what is often found is group activities related to religion. There are six formal religions in this country, Islam, Christianity, Catholic, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. On various occasions, many groups are found with a variety of activities, but not yet widely used for health.

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In addition to religious groups, similar associations exist in sports activities, social-cultural circumstances, and groups related to the economy (companies, community activities, etc.). Of course, young fathers who have families with young children are those who need the most support and assistance. Senior fathers can also be included but are not in priority.

Developing such groups should not be difficult. How to reach and then maintain the continuity is certainly more problematic. As a new idea, we need to start on an experimental scale and then be developed more broadly. In East Java Province, it is expected that by 2020, there will be several sample groups to work on. If successful, the initiative will continue to a greater level.

Dominicus Husada, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Airlangga/ Dr. Soetomo Academic General Hospital, Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: dominicushusada@yahoo.com

Fatherhood in Myanmar

Fatherhood anywhere can be tough, fathers in Myanmar are no exception. It could be less tough if you're prepared to be a father, well-armed, have accumulated wealth before that, but depends also on whether you have family beside you supporting you in going through this battle. Definitely childrearing is not an easy job that you could take it lightly; it takes a village, so it was said. In Myanmar, responsibility of childrearing and father adjusting to a new life is shared by immediate family and in-laws – with understanding and joy – as there is culturally a strong family tie, and young couples most of the time do not have sufficient income to live separately from their parents after getting married; the pattern observed mostly with public service personnel as they move from place to place where the job takes them, having no other alternatives but leaving a young family in the safe hands of their own family or in-laws.

I have an honor of recounting the life of Mr Aung Moe, a father and breadwinner of the family, with his permission, and he generously provided family photos including the one taken at his daughter's wedding to go with this piece. His childhood was nothing remarkable. Being a son of a military personnel, that he himself later became, he had grown up among uncles, aunts and their families while his parents stayed at the military outpost. After graduating from the military academy, he married a beautiful school teacher, served at different places assuming different roles, attended courses required of his job, and ascended to the rank of Colonel before retired from the military to join a business enterprise. In all these time during active duty, he left his daughters in the care of close family, with grandparents, uncles and aunts, barely being able to see them once every 6 months or longer when he had an assignment to come to the city or his daughters joining him to his place during long vacation. He saved enough to send his daughters to good public school to earn their living, and enjoy a comfortable life post-retirement. It was a struggle but it is a life full of determination, commitment, and love for his family and to his nation.



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Passed fifty, he is still fit, holding a job, keeping his daughters under his eyes. He used to meet with colleagues and friends reminiscing their service and hardship they have gone through together, cheering each other up at sad times, celebrating each other's success, dreaming of the brighter days ahead – even in the twilight years, there is a ray of hope, and life could be shining and bright.

His daughters are a testament to his achievements above all. The elder daughter earned both basic and doctoral degrees in Medicine, and has been working at one of the best private hospitals in Myanmar. She recently got married to a nice chap she met in Japan while doing her PhD. Both have a bright future, yet again they are still under the wings of her parents. The younger daughter is a diplomat, she has stayed in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is located. She has earned her Master's degree in international relations from Japan, and at any moment, she might receive an order to take assignment abroad. Once a father, always a father and it seems to be so gratifying to him!

Prof Myat Thandar, Rector, University of Nursing (Yangon)

Email: thandar.myat@gmail.com

Fatherhood in Thailand

The husband finds himself in the position of being a prospective father. The role of mothercraft is mother's role more than father's role in Thailand. The man who raises children in the family is a special role and making him a good man and he will take a pride in doing, however, the woman who takes care of her children is a normal role. The present, most of mothers have to work outside, so father should also raise children. It is very important. If husband helps to raise baby in family, the family will be a happy family.

The roles of good father in Thailand are four parts that are

- 1) to be a good leader person, he can work more income and can decision making for all family members.
- 2) to be a good role model for children to learn from and to follow .
- 3) to be a good husband for his wife, he can protect family members feelings of happiness and safety.
- 4) to be a good citizenship/a good person of society.

Pregnant women need encouragement and support in her mind, homework, and socially from her husband. Child birth preparation is very important particularly in the period before giving birth. In Thailand, her husband can accompany his wife in the labor room or the operation room in only some private hospitals. If the father sees process of birth, he will understand the confrontation of mother's stress and pain during delivery. The husband who understands his wife is willing to raise their baby. There is a research focus on Thai husband's participating to help his wife with breastfeeding. However, many fathers need to be willing to raise his baby but they do not know how to.



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The delivery is very top secret among women, men should not know. Health education classes for fathers are very important to help fathers understand and be involved in taking care of his wife throughout pregnancy and childbirth and continuing through children's lives. Families having involved fathers have good family relationships. The quality of fathers can be seen in the dreams, aspirations, and goals of life that they set not only for themselves, but for their family. Power of love transferring from fathers to babies can make effective growth in children to be a good teenager, good adaptation person, and good citizenship in the future.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Puangpaka Kongvattananon. RN. Ph.D, Faculty of Nursing, Thammasat University, Thailand

Email: puangpaka@nurse.tu.ac.th

Fatherhood in the Philippines

Having emerged from a patriarchal culture with intact matriarchal roots, the Filipino culture considers *tatay*, the Filipino term for father, as the pillars of the house or *haligi ng tahanan*. Traditionally, they were seen as the head of the family and the foundation of the home and society. They were expected to earn a living in order to provide for and



support each member of the family. In a study conducted by McCann World Group Philippines among fathers in Metro Manila, 56% of respondents described themselves as providers, while 30% saw themselves as disciplinarians (source: ABS-CBN News). These percentages show that presently, the conventional image of fathers being the breadwinners and disciplinarians of the family carries on.

In post-modern times, however, the dynamics in the Filipino family had changed. Mothers are not always expected to stay at home and care for the children, while fathers are not always expected of the breadwinner role. In other words, the responsibility re-

garding the children's upbringing is shared with the Filipino fathers. Parents have to evolve to cope and adjust with new roles and responsibilities that come with the evolution in families. However, not all parents can adapt to it. In an article entitled, "Becoming Better *Erpats* (Father)", it was pointed out that more and more fathers are being left behind with the increasing number of married women working abroad to support their families. They were left with the dual role of becoming both the mother and the father to their children. Moreover, this becomes difficult when the father is too young and lacks emotional or financial readiness. Unemployment, drug addiction, alcoholism, diseases, and in light of recent calamities, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are other identified challenges that, when dealt ineffectively by the father, can severely harm child growth and could lead to a broken family (Fabonan, 2015).

As father and mother roles interchange, interventions that cater for fathers are beginning. ERPAT, which stands for Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Paternal Abilities Training, is one of the government's leading intervention programs for fathers. The program, which was first introduced in 1995, aims to equip fathers with crucial knowledge, attitude, and skills that would help them accomplish their roles and responsibilities in the family. All Filipino fathers aged zero to twenty-four years old are catered for.

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The program begins with advocacy and social mobilization activities to solicit support and participation from fathers in the communities. The important role of Filipino fathers in instilling and fostering love, respect, discipline, industry, and care for the family are promoted. Breaking the existing notions and misconceptions about fatherhood and the role of husband in the family is discussed in each module. Immersive and interactive activities to teach men to take on more proactive roles as husbands and fathers are highlighted in the framework by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (Fabonan, 2015). With the increasing number of house-bunds (house husbands), it is important to reiterate with the fathers their changing role as head of the family, raising and understanding the needs of children, and knowing the differences between men and women, among others (Ronda, 2014).

As we live in this digital world, social media has played a vital role in influencing the society. Fathers, too, can utilize this on order to embrace and understand fatherhood better. *The Fatherhood, Philippine National Fatherhood Initiative*, and *The World Needs A Father Philippines* are some of the groups at a social media site in which Filipino fathers could join and learn more about fatherhood.

Having children does not make one a father. Being a father involves active participation in each child's positive growth and development. It is important to remember that both parents are equally important and should have, as much as possible, equal involvement in child rearing. Home, being the place for the basic unit of the society which is the family, is the perfect place to learn and practice love, care, and respect.

Efrelyn A. Iellamo, MAN, RN Assistant Professor College of Nursing University of the Philippines

Email: eaiellamo@up.edu.ph

Fatherhood in Malaysia (1)



A complete family has important roles in supporting every element involved in living. This is including how the couples play vital parts in carrying their child from womb-to-tomb. Often, this matter always puts the emphasis on maternal roles. It is not to highlight that paternal never takes responsibility, but the culture strongly often refers to men as a breadwinner. Though, Malaysia is multi ethnicity, traditionally all races, practices suggest that the mother is supposed to take the real responsibility. Hence, we can observe that, this could be a delay in providing the support to paternal in the past; how can fathers be a part of 'mother' to their child.

However, things have changed nowadays, whereby father roles have been recognised and the assistance can be available for them to seek resources, training and support at various levels of organisation, NGO and both public and private health care provisions. Remarkably, social networks also having taken a part in promoting fatherhood roles recently as a platform educating father on creative way to care their kids and also a series of competition were taking place for bestowing the most creative father in caring their kids. Nevertheless, the promotion on social networks often takes place during seasons rather than continuously, for instance, during father days celebrations.

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In Malaysia, generally the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is responsible taking the purview to ensure every family lives comfortably within the regulated ecosystem. Despite many initiatives available from both sectors, government and NGO, there still a lot of room for improvement for providing excellent support to the father for ensuring their support is indispensable toward caring their kids. Interestingly, a recent ministry communication highlighted that younger Malaysian men are accepting the fatherhood journey better by helping their wives to care for their newborn babies. It is indeed a heartening trend where fathers were not just providing for the family essentials, but was coming forward and perform basic duties like taking care of their kids, including preparing and feeding meals, bathing and changing their diapers. One of the biggest challenges at the present towards this matter is lack of awareness, whereby we believe that the respective ministry can take the lead to ensure our Malaysian father can adopt a better role in the house and society as well.

One of the excellent initiatives given by government to all the working father is a week of paternity leave. Interestingly, this perk also has been extended to private sector employer recently. However, this short duration might not suffice for the father to play a vital role has a fatherhood towards their newborn and children. This is because a father caring for his children is an important piece to the puzzle of solving household issues that face by the community today. Many mothers would not be suffering if the husband took half of the load and provided for children's needs, instead of expecting mothers to bear all the burden. As we all are aware, this modern trend both husband and wife are carry an equal career role outside from home.

To ensure the father continuous support the roles as an excellent father towards their family, government need to intensify the existing scheme by extending paternity leave. On top of that, provide policies to support fatherhood by giving parenting awareness programmes, structured education and training programs for fathers, father-friendly work related policies as well as legal guidelines which do not create barriers to paternal involvement with their children. By doing so, we believe our society will be having a most harmonious family and indirectly creating healthy living and greatly improving the mental and physical well being of their beloved wives.

Associate /Professor Mohd Said Nurumal, Kulliyyah of Nursing, International Islamic University Malaysia
Email: mohdsaid@iium.edu.my

Fatherhood in Malaysia (2)

"Fathers, like mothers, are not born. Men grow into fathers, and fathering is a very important stage in their development." – David Gottesman.

The above statement by Mr David Gottesman is very true but unfortunately fatherhood support is not as freely available as motherhood. Most fathers, may end up experimenting on themselves in trying to be the best father for their child. For those who are more tech savvy, relying on websites using simple Google search may provide some idea and solutions to their concerns. Thanks to the improved education and awareness, most fathers now are more involved in child care matters. Perhaps, women are more empowered now to ensure husband share the responsibilities in upbringing child and be more participative in family matters.



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My late mum used to say that in Malaysia, fathers in last few decades are not as supportive as fathers now. Men tend to disassociate them self from responsibilities associated with child care such as changing baby diapers, feeding and even carrying babies during outings. Recently, the Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development (Ms Hannah Yeoh) mentioned that young men are embracing fatherhood better than before. However, her words should not be celebrated as similar to my late mum's statement, Ms Hanna's words was just based on her personal observation. There is lack of evidence based research information in Malaysia that could strongly support her claim. In the 'Fatherhood Transition' phenomenon in Malaysia there is an urgent need to answer some pertinent research questions. Is the 'Fatherhood Transition' phenomenon really true? What is the proportion of fathers in this group? Who are they? Where does a father go to seek help? What kind of support do they need? Are the necessary supports available?

As mentioned above, current education improvement and empowerment of women may play a role in positive fatherhood. However, there could be many more who are still practicing the traditional fatherhood culture. In Malaysia, most attention was towards motherhood leaving behind the focus on fatherhood especially among those in rural area and those with lower education and socioeconomic status. In Malaysia, it is compulsory for Muslim brides and bridegrooms to attend a 2 day seminar Marriage Course. During these 2 days, couples are taught on 3 main aspects namely basic Islamic understanding, family management and family conflict management. Unfortunately, there is little emphasis both on motherhood and fatherhood. The National Population and Family Development Board also organizes voluntary courses on fatherhood both for Muslim and Non-muslim parents. However, little is known whether the courses have received a good response from newlywed couples and parents.

In conclusion, fatherhood in Malaysia could be achieved by default. Perhaps, fatherhood could be made more successful by design through formal and informal training and continuous support from government and relevant Non-governmental associations.

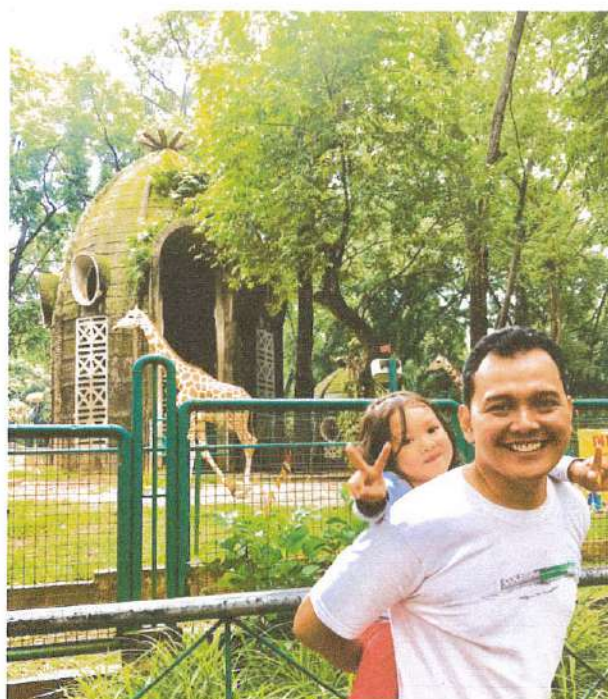
Dr Hamid Jan B. Jan Mohamed (Assoc. Prof), School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Email: hamidjan@usm.my

Fatherhood in Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the most populous and country in the world. With a total population of 264 million, the country is inhabited by diverse ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture. Alongside the national language Bahasa Indonesia, around 350 different languages and many more dialects are spoken. The legal system with regard to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption is plural, with separate courts for the Muslim population (about 88%) applying Islamic law, and national law for the rest of the population, whereas customary law is still recognized as legally binding by the state in matters of family law. Religion, customs and customary law prominently influence the lives of Indonesians. Values, norms and practices rooted in religion and custom often determine the degree of involvement of women in development and determine fulfillment of basic rights, access to education, health services, financial resources and status of men and women in the family.

Most Indonesian men will become father at some point in their life. The role of fathers is pivotal to establishing healthy and harmonious families.



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However, the role that is played by most Indonesian fathers is to support the economic needs of the family. While the domestic matters, including caring for children and sick family members is mainly the responsibility of mothers. Public policies in Indonesia do not promote men's and boys' involvement as fathers and caregivers in the framework of achieving gender equality. In Indonesia, there is no formal support available for fathers. The provision of encouragement is commonly provided by the community and religion leaders. Despite the absence of formal support, it is important to foster mutual respect between men and women and gender equality, which are so important to the well-being of children and the future of the nation.

Written BY:

Dr. Agus Setiawan
Dean

Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Indonesia

Kampus UI Depok Jawa Barat 16424

Email: a-setiawan@ui.ac.id

Fatherhood in Singapore

The relationship between fatherlessness and the resultant social issues such as crime, poverty, gangsterism, incarceration, drug abuse is well established. Over the past twenty years, numerous studies have forced society to confront the deep-rooted problems associated with fatherlessness. The cost of fatherlessness to Singapore is incalculable because its consequences tear at the fabric of society. Fatherlessness could possibly be most serious social issue we face today.

While it is important to address the social issues caused by fatherlessness, it is imperative to get to the root of the issue – by eradicating fatherlessness. Benjamin Franklin once said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Good fathering in Singapore has been associated with children's positive school engagement and higher academic achievement.

Therefore, the push for active and involved fathering is an investment into the future generation of Singapore that we cannot afford not to make.



About the Centre for Fathering

The Centre for Fathering (CFF) was established in 2000 to address fatherlessness and the issues arising from it in Singapore. The organisation aims to turn the hearts of children towards their fathers by empowering more fathers to be better role models and an enduring inspiration to their children.

Over the last two decades, CFF has helped more than 47,000 fathers and their families through activities such father-child experiential programmes, shared parenting talks and fathering workshops conducted in schools, prisons, religious organisations and companies.

CFF's series of ICAN (Involvement, Consistency, Awareness and Nurturance) workshops help participants at all life stages become more effective Dads and parents. The workshops enable participants to appreciate the significant impact and influence their marriage, actions and conversations have on their children. Father-child bonding workshops such as Breakfast with DAD, Adventure@DAH and Father-Child Experiential Workshop bring an unforgettable experience for both Dad and children while strengthening their relationship. CFF also provides father coaching services to empower fathers to build healthy and nurturing relationships with their children.

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In recent years, these activities have seen increasing traction among various ethnic communities and deeper reach to fathers of youths-at-risk and special needs children as well as single fathers and those who are incarcerated. CFF also designs and conducts research to ensure its programmes are crafted to meet specific needs of various community segments especially fathers of families in need.

About DADs for Life

Since 2015, CFF has also been the driving force behind Singapore's nation-wide fathering movement - DADs for Life which seeks to inspire and involve fathers to be good influencers in their children's lives... for LIFE. The national fathering movement also mobilises fathers to A.C.T.:

- Be Aware of the importance of a father's role
- Commit to be good fathers and role models to their children
- Spend Time, acquire Tools and bring Transformation to lives

Under the Dads for Life umbrella are nation-wide initiatives such as Back to School with DAD, Eat With Your Family Day and our month-long Celebrating Fathers campaign – to encourage fathers to spend time with their families and create a culture that promotes active and involved fathering.

Back to School with Dad is an initiative that encourages Dads to make a commitment to send and enter the school gates with their children, on the first day of every new school year.

Eat with Your Family Day is held every last Friday of the quarterly school term, to enable participating companies, government organizations & schools to allow their staff to leave work early and have dinner with their families.

Celebrating Fathers is a month-long celebration of Fatherhood that culminates on Father's Day in Singapore, to recognise the important roles that Dads play in the home, community and society, so as to encourage active fatherhood.

Contact Person:
Yuen Chee Onn

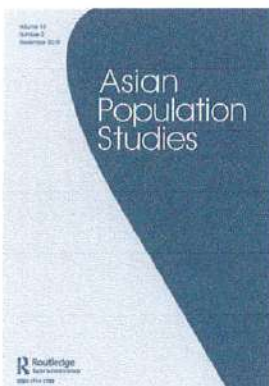
Group Head of Engagement and Programmes

RESEARCH

Recent Research on fathers in Southeast Asia

FRB comment by DrShefaly Shorey, Assistant Professor, Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore

Ultra-low fertility in East Asia: Policy responses and challenges



Despite the developments in pronatalist policy, its effect on East Asia countries' (e.g. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hongkong) fertility rates seems to be limited. This paper addresses the factors hindering the effectiveness of pronatalist policies and to propose plausible interventions required. Despite efforts to raise fertility (i.e. subsidise cost of raising children), the success of improved pronatalist policies is hindered by financial and population factors such as: (1) high standards of living, (2) insecure incomes and employment, (3) rising housing costs, (4) high financial costs of raising children, (5) the pressure to raise successful children, (6) challenges for women to attain work-family balance, (7) family unfriendly workplace, and (8) decreasing population and increasing ageing population.

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These factors put pressure on individuals of the society to be financially capable in raising children. Even for individuals who are financially stable, they struggle with the idea of balancing work and family. With decreasing population but increasing ageing population, it reduces the odds of young couples being together. Altogether, these factors are obstacles that contribute to the low fertility rates, hindering the success of pronatalist policies in East Asia. Therefore, when implementing change in pronatalist policies, it is imperative to consider the following components: (1) certainty with job security, (2) financial support, (3) developments to help women deal with work-family balance, (4) work culture that assist individuals to attain work-life balance, and (5) changes in men's attitudes so that burden of child bearing and rearing do not fall heavily on mothers. With these developments, chances of individuals opting for marriage and childbearing might increase, and hence, result in higher fertility rates.

Jones, G. W. (2019). Ultra-low fertility in East Asia: policy responses and challenges. *Asian Population Studies*, 15(2), 131-149. doi:10.1080/17441730.2019.1594656

Education and childrearing decision-making in East Asia



Articles

Unfulfilled Promise of Educational Meritocracy? Academic Ability and China's Urban-Rural Gap in Access to Higher Education
Angsun Li

The Effects of Media Use and Traditional Gender Role Beliefs on Tolerance of Homosexuality in China
Kang He and Xinying Li

Parent-Child Coresidence and Experiences of Romantic Relationships: Evidence from Young Adults in Taiwan
Wei-shin Hsueh, Zhenyong Lin and Kuo-hsien Su

The Confucian Legalist State and Theory Building Based on Ideal-Type Set
Dingxin Zhao



Using data from 2006 East Asia Social Survey and 2012 International Social Survey Program, this paper aims to evaluate how couples make childrearing decisions and the role of education in shaping such decision in China, Taiwan, and Japan. Findings revealed that in China, both husbands and wives participate in the childrearing decision-making, and in Taiwan, there is a combination of high levels of sole childrearing decision-making by either the husband or wife. Additionally, specific to China and Taiwan, regardless of gender, the parent who has attained a higher level of education is more likely to take sole charge in childrearing decisions. This implies that parents' human capital may play a more prominent role than gender boundaries in parenting behaviour as the better-educated parent holds a greater responsibility in childrearing decision-making. In the case of Japan, wives make the most sole childrearing decisions while husbands make the least sole childrearing decision-making. This

phenomenon can be explained by how Japanese married woman continue to be culturally idolised as the primary caregiver of children while fathers remain to be the breadwinner and they face cultural and institutional barriers to participate actively in parenting. Gender role barriers are apparent as fathers are prevented from assuming the role of primary caregivers and the female labour force participation rates remain low in Japan, with most women landing jobs in noncareer track or secondary roles. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of female labour force participation and cultural norms and roles of fathers and mothers in shaping childrearing decision-making. The role of parents' human capital in terms of educational level is likely to be greater in childrearing decisions in the future, especially with parenting expectations, technological advancements, and intensifying competition in education and labour market.

Hu, S., & Yeung, W. J. (2019). Education and Childrearing Decision-Making in East Asia. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 51(1), 29-56. doi:10.1080/21620555.2019.1571903

Fostering a father-inclusive practice approach with immigrant and refugee families

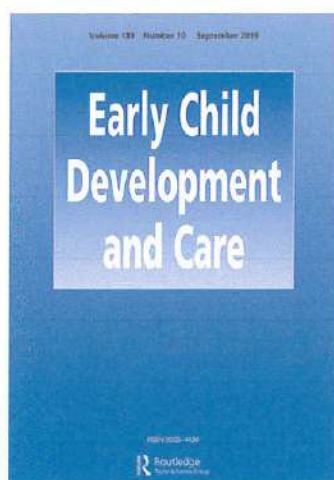


As fathers continue to be excluded from social work practice, this review aims to provide an overview of the essential role of fathers in child development, barriers that immigrant and refugee fathers face, their resilience during the immigration process, and most importantly, how social work clinicians can establish a father-inclusive practice. Fathers' active involvement and love are essential and complementary components in a co-parental relationship that promotes healthy and positive children outcomes. However, immigrant fathers face some social stressors and barriers –premigration trauma, acculturation stress, unemployment, social isolation, discrimination, and ambiguous loss (i.e. someone who experience the feeling of being “there but not there”). To counteract these stressors and barriers, fathers possess resilient characteristics akin to be a positive role model, having the strength of ethnic pride, hope, and optimism towards migration to provide an opportunity for individual growth and family development. More importantly, these fathers connect strongly to their family values and belief in consistency and continuity in their paternal role. Therefore, it is imperative to establish an appropriate framework that aims to attain a father-inclusive practice. The establishment of a culturally informed socioecological family systems model could direct clinicians to attend to multiple voices and contexts of paternal attachment and attend to immigrant fathers. This approach could offer a framework for father-inclusive practice by working with the whole family unit as opposed to separate parts of the system or by excluding fathers' role. Hence, this helps to facilitate the accessing of family strengths and resilience to help better integrate and include them into social work practice.

Bond, S. (2019). The essential role of the father: fostering a father-inclusive practice approach with immigrant and refugee families. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 22(1), 101-123. doi:10.1080/10522158.2019.1546965

Bond, S. (2019). The essential role of the father: fostering a father-inclusive practice approach with immigrant and refugee families. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 22(1), 101-123. doi:10.1080/10522158.2019.1546965

Fathers' early involvement with infants across cultures



Despite the advantages of fathers' involvement with infants on their overall wellbeing, little is known about the factors that influence fathers' involvement with infants. From a cross-cultural perspective, this research study aimed to test the effects of selected demographic variables on father involvement with infants. A total of 107 fathers were recruited from the United States (n = 31), Taiwan (n = 36), and Thailand (n = 37) to explore fathers' involvement in daily caregiving, engagement tasks, and accessibility to their infants during the weekdays and weekends. They were required to complete a survey and questionnaire that contained demographic sheet and child-related tasks. Results revealed that fathers across all three countries demonstrated less involvement in infant caregiving tasks but more participation in engagement or entertaining tasks. The most influential demographic variables on father involvement were fathers' education, income, and number of children in the household. Also, fathers displayed different involvement during the weekdays and weekend.

fathers displayed different involvement during the weekdays and weekend.

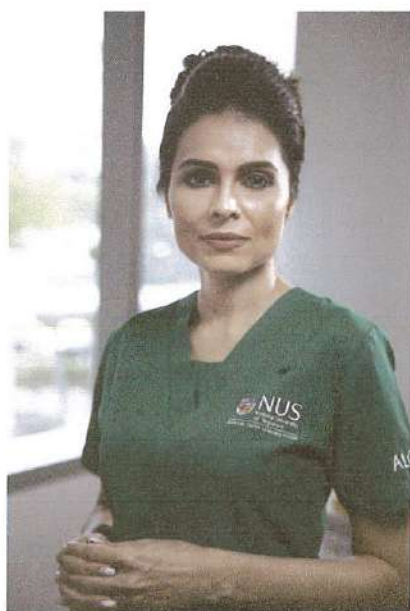
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Fathers in the United States displayed higher infant involvement during the weekend as compared to fathers in Taiwan and Thailand. This could be due to the difference in cultural values and expectations, father's workload, and socioeconomic status. These findings imply the importance of cultural competencies and expectations when working with fathers from different cultural settings. It is crucial to offer opportunities for fathers to expand their role in the involvement and support of their infants, as opposed to just being a breadwinner of the household.

Yeh, C. J., Ballard, S., Bian, H., Singh, A., Chung, C., Hwang, S. H., ... Thongsaeng, P. (2019). An exploratory cross-cultural study: fathers' early involvement with infants. *Early Child Development and Care*, 1-16.
doi:10.1080/03004430.2019.1621859

RESEARCHER PROFILE

Dr Shefaly Shorey, PhD, MSc, BSc (Gen Science), RN, RM
Assistant Professor, Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore



Being a nurse and a midwife I have been engaged both clinically and academically in supporting new parents for the past decade. Due to the bed crunch early discharges after giving birth in the hospitals are a common sight in the clinical. I have seen many new parents felt overwhelmed by the amount of information disseminated to them by the healthcare providers during their compressed hospital stays and they had difficulties retaining the information received in baby care tasks. After attaining Ph.D., I have dedicated my professional life to examining and understanding the needs of new parents. It all started with the in-depth interviews with the first-time mothers in Singapore where I found that new mothers have many unmet needs and they wish to be more supported by their family members especially their husbands. That led me to then interview Singaporean fathers with the pressing query in my mind "Why aren't they (fathers) supporting their partners in baby care tasks?". To my surprise when I heard the fathers' point of view regarding their involvement in childcare tasks, it opened up a whole new world regarding fatherhood and their needs in Singapore. I felt bad to see how fathers were 'misunderstood' and felt being treated as 'lampposts' in the maternity units. Fathers shared their perspectives of having strong desires to be "involved in childcare" but how they are prohibited from doing so, by the "maternal gate-keeping" and unsupportive healthcare professionals. I felt guilty of being one such healthcare professional who didn't pay attention to the needs of fathers and the importance of their involvement in family care. What made me very sad was the fact that both parents (mothers and fathers) "longed for each other's support" in family care tasks and yet they were oblivious to each other's needs. I decided to fill this gap by examining fathers' experiences and support needs in childcare involvement and creating awareness on fatherhood from multi-cultural Singapore's society.

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Since 2016, I am working with different groups of fathers through my research to strengthen their voices in Southeast Asia so that I can break the myths on Asian stereotypes of father's roles. My ultimate goal is to create global awareness on fatherhood in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Recent papers by Dr Shefaly Shorey

Shorey, S., Ang, L., Goh, E. C., & Gandhi, M. (2019). Factors influencing paternal involvement during infancy: A prospective longitudinal study. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 75(2), 357-367.

Shorey, S., & Ang, L. (2019). Experiences, needs, and perceptions of paternal involvement during the first year after their infants' birth: A meta-synthesis. *PloS one*, 14(1).

Shorey, S., Ang, L., Goh, E. C., & Lopez, V. (2019). Paternal involvement of Singaporean fathers within six months postpartum: A follow-up qualitative study. *Midwifery*, 70, 7-14.

Shorey, S., Dennis, C. L., Bridge, S., Chong, Y. S., Holroyd, E., & He, H. G. (2017). First-time fathers' postnatal experiences and support needs: A descriptive qualitative study. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 73(12), 2987-2996.

Shorey, S., He, H. G., & Morelius, E. (2016). Skin-to-skin contact by fathers and the impact on infant and paternal outcomes: an integrative review. *Midwifery*, 40, 207-217.

Shorey, S., Ang, L., & Goh, E. C. (2018). Lived experiences of Asian fathers during the early postpartum period: Insights from qualitative inquiry. *Midwifery*, 60, 30-35.

Xue, W. L., Shorey, S., Wang, W., & He, H. G. (2018). Fathers' involvement during pregnancy and childbirth: an integrative literature review. *Midwifery*, 62, 135-145.

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Or contact Richard Fletcher:

richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au



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