

Fatherhood Experiences of Some Selected Young Adults in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Fatherhood is a multidimensional and evolving concept, often shaped by cultural, emotional, and relational dynamics. In Bangladesh, scholarly exploration of fatherhood remains significantly limited, making it difficult to establish a prototypical understanding or to trace its changing meanings. This study aims to explore the lived experiences and interpretations of fatherhood among educated, motherless young adults, focusing specifically on their emotional attachment to their surviving fathers. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 10 young adults, this study identifies four key themes: eternal maternal bondage, grief and adjustment mechanisms, the role and involvement of fathers, and the extent of family support to fathers. These themes reflect how participants make sense of fatherhood through their personal journeys. These young adults continue to share a strong bond with their surviving mothers, but have closely observed how their fathers coped with grief and bereavement following the loss of their partners, how they assumed parenting roles and responsibilities in raising them, and the extent to which family and relatives supported their fathers during this period. The insights provided by this study contribute to a nuanced understanding of fatherhood in Bangladesh and offer valuable implications for both theoretical frameworks and policy development concerning family dynamics and parental roles.

Keywords: Bangladesh; father, fatherhood, roles, young adults

1. INTRODUCTION

Fatherhood is a dynamic, complex, and multifaceted concept. Scholars widely acknowledge that fathers play a significant, multidimensional role in their children's lives (Hernandez & Coley, 2007). Fatherhood typically reflects the biological and social relationships between a male parent and his offspring. Beyond the conventional biological/reproductive role of a man, fatherhood is ideally understood as a set of parenting behaviors that reflect the rights and obligations society expects of men/fathers. Society expects fathers to demonstrate appropriate parenting behaviors within families, including loving, nurturing, supporting, providing for, and protecting their children (Coltrane, 2001). Thus, while the biological aspects of fatherhood such as sexuality, fertility, and procreation are important, they are less impactful than the sociological aspects (Lamb, 2000).

Over time, the dominant or defining themes of fatherhood have varied, making it difficult to provide a precise and clear-cut definition (Hublin, 2013; Lamb, 2000). From a sociological perspective, the concept of fatherhood has shifted from traditional roles of moral guidance to breadwinning, gender-role behavior, marital support, and nurturing (Lamb, 2000; Dette-Hagenmeyer, Erzinger, & Reichle, 2014). Many (sub)cultures have developed their own interpretations of fatherhood and the range of care provided by fathers (Dette-Hagenmeyer et al., 2014). The old model of fathers as breadwinners, protectors, and authoritative figures is increasingly challenged by a more "involved" cultural ideal of fatherhood. This new model has emerged alongside the ongoing transformation of the traditional gender order (Lengersdorf & Meuser, 2016; Lee & Tian, 2023). It has become undoubtedly clear that the emerging transformation in the broader gender landscape has created possibility for reimagining fatherhood practices and discourses beyond stereotypically held imagines.

In contemporary societies, fatherhood encounters a distinct shift. First, a father is expected to fulfill the traditional role of provider and protector, and second, he must also demonstrate a more active, involved, and caring role. In this context, a father is

expected to be physically and emotionally available, responsive to his children's needs, and committed to ensuring their well-being. Fatherhood, therefore, appears to be a balancing act between traditional and modern roles and expectations, a process that often generates tensions and contradictions (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Offer & Kaplan, 2021). For many fathers, choosing between "old fatherhood" and "new fatherhood" presents its own challenges (Stubley, Rojas, & McCroy, 2015). The transition to fatherhood can bring feelings of happiness, love, and excitement, yet it may also be marked by frustration, anger, and helplessness when societal expectations and demands are not successfully met or acknowledged (Lewington, Lee, & Sebar, 2021).

The involvement of both parents is crucial for the social and emotional upbringing of children. While mothers, by nature of pregnancy, childbirth, and early caregiving, may initially play a more dominant role, both parents' roles gradually adjust to meet their children's growing needs (Gežová, 2015; Dette-Hagenmeyer et al., 2014). Despite increasing recognition of the importance of fathers, they still lag behind mothers in terms of involvement. Most scholarly research on parenting tends to focus more on mothers. There is a need to explore diverse aspects of fatherhood, including fathers' involvement, their contributions, the father-child relationship, and father-child attachment (Cabrera, 2019). Globally, fatherhood is increasingly being integrated into family research, policy, and practice (United Nations, 2011). With this in mind, we aim to explore some critical aspects of fatherhood experiences in Bangladesh through this scholarly intervention.

Bangladesh, a country in South Asia, has a population of 165 million people (50.50% female and 49.50% male) (BBS, 2022). There is a lack of systematic and empirical literature on the roles, responsibilities, and involvement of fathers, making it difficult to form an ideal image or understand the changing nature of fatherhood in Bangladesh (Sabur, 2019; Hossain, 2013). However, the following review synthesizes insights from limited existing research to characterize the nature of fatherhood in Bangladesh. Due to the dearth of empirical research in the Bangladeshi context, this literature review is necessarily descriptive and limited in scope.

Knowingly, Ball and Wahedi (2010) first studied fatherhood as an essential element of Bangladeshi male identity. Although Bangladeshi fathers are often portrayed as authoritative breadwinners, the authors observed that many fathers take on more involved roles as well. They identified four categories of Bangladeshi fatherhood: family fathering, isolated fathering, sibling fathering, and lone fathering. Each category presents a distinct identity and set of implications. Hamadani and Tofail (2014) observed that fatherhood varies based on men's intersectional identities. For example, fathers from middle-income and non-Muslim families tend to engage more with their children and show greater awareness of their needs, compared to fathers from low-income and Muslim families, who prioritize providing for their children over emotional attachment. Sabur and Rosy (2022) expressed concern about the complex dynamics of fatherhood and masculinity, noting that fatherhood practices are closely linked to hegemonic or traditional views of masculinity in Bangladesh. In this framework, fathers are seen as breadwinners and protectors who remain emotionally detached from their children. While many men acknowledge the need to be more involved and compassionate fathers, they often fail to embody these ideals. Consequently, the involved fatherhood model seems to be at odds with traditional masculinity.

Apart from the male identity domain of fatherhood as expressed by the above studies, Sabur (2019) examined fatherhood across generations and found that younger fathers practice a distinct model of fatherhood, different from the older generation. For older fathers, fatherhood is seen as an obligation, aligning with traditional models. In contrast, younger fathers tend to be more involved and emotionally connected to their children. This shift is influenced by factors such as the rise of nuclear families,

women's increased participation in the labour market, and greater awareness of the importance of involved fatherhood.

While comparing both mothers' and fathers' perceived engagement in children's care, Hossain & Atencio (2013) found that mothers in both rural and urban areas are more involved in caring for their children than fathers. Rural fathers spend less time caring for and assisting their children compared to urban fathers. However, changes in Bangladesh's socioeconomic context, including women's growing labour market participation, have encouraged both rural and urban men to take on more active fatherhood roles. Murshid (2016), on the other hand, found that older, educated, and wealthier fathers in Bangladesh are more likely to be involved in childcare and healthcare. However, father involvement decreases significantly when women have higher decision-making power within the household.

In a comparative study of fatherhood in five countries, including Bangladesh, Shwalb and Shwalb (2014) observed that social expectations for father involvement are less consistent in countries like Russia, Bangladesh, and Brazil. While expectations are higher in Japan and Australia, Bangladesh lacks pro-fathering policies, which discourages active fathering. Additionally, poverty and unemployment limit men's ability to engage in active fatherhood in countries like Russia, Bangladesh, and Brazil.

While the existing literature touches on various aspects of fatherhood in Bangladesh, such as the traditional and evolving roles, intersectional factors like socioeconomic status and religion, and the generational differences in parenting practices, there are several points of fatherhood where a deeper understanding is necessary. Given the critical gap in the existing research, this study is designed to explore the diverse experiences, constructions and understanding of fatherhood from the perspective of motherless young men raised by their father in Bangladesh. This study moves beyond the stereotypical 'provider' role of Bangladeshi fathers by examining their capacity and involvement in parenting particularly in the context of maternal absence. This focus is crucial, as it addresses a significant gap in the literature: the underexamined experiences of fatherhood within a culture where parenting remains heavily mother-centric.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative study, conducted between March and April 2024, sought to explore the narrative accounts of selected individuals regarding their experiences and perceptions of fatherhood within the context of Bangladesh. The participants were current or former students of a private university located in the capital city of the country. A convenience sampling method was employed in this study, meaning that participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. Participants were recruited through an invitation posted on an online social group platforms commonly used by current students and alumni of the university. The study is a part of student research project, strictly conducted under the guidance of an experienced faculty member and it adhered to all standard ethical protocols of social science research, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the measures in place to protect their privacy and data throughout the research process.

3.2 Sampling

Ten young adults who had lost their mothers voluntarily agreed to participate without any form of compensation. The main inclusion criteria required that participants had lost their mothers and were subsequently raised by their fathers. All were Muslims, aged between 20 and 29 years. Seven were male and three were female;

only two were married at the time of the interviews. Five were former students of East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, while the remaining five were current undergraduate students. Their mothers died between 2015 and 2023. The fathers of the participants, four businessmen and six service holders, chose not to remarry, prioritizing raising their children instead. Based on their income levels, these fathers represented the middle-class socio-economic background of Bangladesh

3.3 Data collection

After obtaining informed consent, the second author conducted the interviews in Bangla, the local language. Each interview lasted between 50 and 70 minutes. The interview guidelines consisted of eight broad questions covering key themes such as the father's involvement in the child's life following the mother's death, the impact of the mother's death on the father, the father's role within the family, the support provided by other family members in fulfilling fatherhood responsibilities and so on. These broad questions allowed for flexibility, enabling the interviewer to explore topics further through probing and supplementary questions. It is important to note that the questions were not based on any standardized instrument; rather, as a qualitative study, the design allowed for the integration of existing knowledge on fatherhood with the participants' lived experiences. Additionally, participants were asked a set of general demographic questions. All interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants to ensure their comfort, safety, and confidentiality. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded.

While this study did not undergo a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) process due to its status as a non-funded student assignment, the interview guidelines and research protocol were rigorously reviewed and approved by the course instructor at East West University. This internal review ensured that all ethical standards including participant anonymity, informed consent, and the 'do no harm' principle were strictly maintained.

3.4 Data Analysis

This section Interview transcripts were translated and transcribed into English by the second author. The transcripts were then audited and validated against the original recordings by the first author. For data analysis, all researchers closely reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a clear understanding of the participants' narratives. All transcripts were given equal importance and were manually coded line by line in an inductive, data-driven process. The authors carefully identified recurring experiences and feelings, which were compiled into meaningful categories and themes, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis. Finally, these themes were triangulated with relevant empirical and theoretical literature, as outlined in the paper's discussion section. This process involved cross-referencing the participants' experiences and insights with the existing studies and theoretical frameworks to ensure the findings were robust and well-grounded. By comparing the emergent themes with established research, the study aimed to highlight consistencies, contradictions, and potential new contributions to the field. Notably, to protect participant identities, only their initials were used in the analysis.

4. RESULTS

Based on the in-depth interviews, several broad themes were identified from the transcripts, including: eternal maternal bonds, grief and adjustment mechanisms, the role and involvement of fathers, and the extent of family support for fathers. Each of these themes appears to be closely intertwined, reflecting the diverse experiences of fatherhood.

4.1 Eternal Maternal Bondage

The discussion on fatherhood inevitably led participants to reflect on memories of their mothers. They found it difficult to separate the involvement and importance of their mothers in their lives. Participants expressed a strong connection with their mothers, as illustrated below:

She was such an important person in my life, and losing her at a young age was undoubtedly one of the hardest things I've ever had to endure. Sometimes, I find myself recalling the warmth of her hugs, the sound of her laughter, and the wisdom she shared with me. Though it's painful to think of her absence, her memory still brings me a sense of comfort and serenity. Even though she's no longer physically by my side, her presence continues to influence my life (AA, a male participant).

Similar sentiments were expressed by other participants:

My mother's words still resonate with me. Normally, daughters are often centred around their fathers, but I was always centred around my mother. She meant everything to me, I mean, everything. I never imagined being separated from her. She is still with me, even appearing in my dreams and guiding me along the way (SNP, a female participant).

Without my mother, nothing else comes to mind. No one is comparable to her (SMS, a male participant).

I am deeply attached to her in every aspect. I can't describe her absence in words (ATN, a male participant).

The narratives above highlight the deep bond between mothers and their children. Nearly all participants spoke about the various roles their mothers played in their lives and the fond memories that characterized their relationship. For most participants, the death of their mothers has left a profound void in their lives. A few excerpts are stated below:

My relationship with my mother was deeply meaningful and influential. Despite her busy schedule, she always made time for me, whether it was helping me with my homework, attending my school events, or simply sitting down to talk about my day. As I grew older, our bond became even stronger. She encouraged me to pursue my interests and supported me through the highs and lows of adolescence. Even as I gained more independence, she remained a constant presence in my life, offering her love and guidance every step of the way (AA, a male participant).

Even during high school, we would consult about my academic decisions, career choices, and personal challenges, valuing her wisdom and experience. Our relationship continued to deepen as I transitioned into adulthood, with us sharing mutual respect, understanding, and love (SAR, a male participant).

The excerpts above emphasize the significant role of mothers in nurturing and guiding their children's lives. In contrast to the typical patriarchal nature of society, mothers in Bangladesh do more than fulfil traditional roles of cooking and managing the household; they also serve as key role models. Participants portrayed motherhood as a practice rooted in mutual respect, understanding, and love, an idea which contradicts popular discourses about meanings of motherhood and fatherhood. They described their mothers as 'always being there' for them, which provided mothers with the opportunity to understand their children's personal challenges more deeply. The concept of mothers 'always being there' warrants careful contextual reflection.

Participants' narratives suggest two possible interpretations of this phrase. The first refers to the physical presence of mothers, while the second, and perhaps more significant, relates to the quality of time they spent with their children. Participants shared how they felt a strong, positive connection with their mothers, resisting the traditional binary view of women as solely nurturers and fathers as figures of authority and control.

4.2 Grief and Adjustment Mechanism

Participants were asked to reflect on how their fathers managed their identities as biological parents who had lost a loved one. Nearly all participants reported that their fathers experienced profound shock and confusion following the death of their mothers. They noted that the loss had clear implications for their fathers, particularly in navigating the roles and demands of fatherhood. According to the participants, the death of their mothers led to significant physical, social, emotional, and even economic challenges, as expressed by *IH*, a male participant, in the excerpt below.

My father still feels deeply saddened and mourns the loss of his wife, especially since their marital bond was so strong at the time. The death of my mother has truly affected my father greatly. There were nights when my father struggled to sleep, haunted by the thought of how suddenly a healthy person can pass away. My mother was relatively young, yet she ultimately succumbed to a normal fever (IH, a male participant).

In examining the importance of biological mothers, *IH* draws on a discourse to foreground how the loss of one's wife tends to produce feeling of pain, grieve, and emptiness. The participant struggles to come to terms with the reality that his mother died from "a normal fever". The participant seems to be concerned about the vacuum created about the death of his mother. Even without explicitly explaining how normative masculinities are being troubled and tested during the death of one's wife, the narrative of *IH* is quite instructive in this regard. The statement: "The death of my mother has truly affected my father greatly" speaks to the incompleteness of people and losing one produces a sense of unimaginable grieve and pain. Indeed, the word 'bothered' is discursively used to attribute some kind of specialness or importance to the influence of mothers. Additionally, *IH*'s narratives highlight how his father equally struggles to sleep illustrated by the statement "There are nights when my father struggles to sleep". To not being able to have self-control in managing pain and grieve as normatively required of men speaks to the situationally fluid nature of masculinity.

Similarly, participants like *SNP*, a female participant, observed that in addition to losing the emotional connection with their wives, some fathers also face financial difficulties, which further complicates their healing trajectories. She explains further:

Losing a loved one is incredibly difficult. When my mother passed away, it felt like my whole world came to a halt. Not only was I grieving, but my father also lost a significant source of financial support. My mother worked for the government and her salary helped cover our household expenses. Now, my father was left to manage everything on his own. Despite the challenges, I knew I had to step up and support my father during this tough time (SNP, a female participant).

The narrative above points to a much more complicated notion of what fatherhood may mean and negotiated in the context of male unemployment and economic precarity. Here, we see the relationship between men's ability to economically provide for their children independently and conceptions of fatherhood as deeply complicated construct. In most societies across the world, normative conceptions of father, and by extension, masculinity are usually associated with being

independent providers. This is not the case in this particular scenario, where the man draws on the financial support of his wife to enable him perform normative fatherhood. Some participants also observed the adjustment processes that worked for their fathers. The processes of recovery are invariably linked to fathers' future role, responsibilities, and involvement with their children.

He went through a period of mourning and adjustment, grappling with feelings of sadness, loneliness, and uncertainty about the future. However, he remained resilient and dedicated everything to ensuring my well-being despite his own grief. He quickly realised the need of adjustment to the reality of life for the sake of my upbringing (AA, a male participant).

Another participant remarked as followed:

Yes, my father was broken inside, but he did not want to show us. The loss of my mother deeply affected my father's life. He struggled with grief and had to adjust to life without her companionship and support. He went through a period of mourning and had to navigate the challenges of single parenthood, taking on responsibilities he had not faced before. Additionally, her absence left a void in his life that he had to learn to cope with, both emotionally and practically for his children (FM, a female participant).

The narratives above reveal the fragility of gendered identities, as illustrated by the statement, "my father was broken inside, but he did not want to show us." This highlights the problematic expectations tied to dominant notions of masculinity, which dictate that men should conceal their grief and maintain an appearance of invulnerability. Even during moments of profound loss, men are expected to manage the situation by employing coping strategies and adjustment mechanisms.

Across the interviews, participants consistently noted that their fathers faced significant challenges in these difficult circumstances, as they were suddenly separated from their long-time partners. Intimate relationships often leave a lasting impact, and the loss of a partner creates a significant void in the life of the surviving spouse. However, participants also observed that, in most cases, their fathers made efforts to adjust to this new reality and prepared themselves to stand strong for their children.

4.3 The Role and Involvement of Fathers

A key theme that emerged from this study was the role and attachment of fathers to their children after the loss of their mothers. Fathers went through a period of grief and distress following the loss of their partners, which made it difficult for them to fully support their children. However, most fathers had to quickly take on the responsibility of raising their young children in every essential way. They continued to fulfill both traditional and modern aspects of fatherhood. The following excerpts illustrate the profound involvement of fathers in their children's lives.

After my mother's passing, my father's presence in my life became even more significant. He stepped up to fill the void left by her absence, taking on all the responsibilities. As a single parent, my father became not just my caregiver, but also my emotional support system and role model. He managed the household, ensured our basic needs were met, and created a stable and nurturing environment for me to grow up in. He was always available to listen to my concerns as I navigated the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. Furthermore, my father continued to instill in me the values and principles that were important to our family, honoring my mother's memory by keeping her influence alive in our lives (AA, a male participant).

My father has had to take the lead of our entire family with his utmost effort. He never let us feel like we wouldn't have our mother back. After my mom's passing, my dad took on a significantly more prominent role in my life. He was not only my parent, but also my constant source of encouragement and guidance. For example, he made sure to be there for me during difficult times, offering comfort and advice whenever I needed it, teaching me how to navigate life's challenges without my mom's presence. My father has worked hard to provide for every need of our family, and he has never made us feel like we are going to face a financial crisis (RAK, a male participant).

After my mother's death, my father played a very important role. If I could overcome my depression, it is only because of my father. He used to talk to me, and he tries his best to ensure that I do not get upset or I do not cry. After I saw everything, I made the decision to be strong. From that point on, I never cried in front of my father. I resolved that if my father can be strong for me and my siblings, then I can also be strong for him. (TT, a female participant).

Participants also shared examples of fathers engaging in household chores and activities that were traditionally performed by mothers. In most cases, the role of Bangladeshi fathers has been largely limited to providing financial support for their families. Their masculine identities are often defined by not being involved in household tasks, which are traditionally seen as feminine roles.

After my mother died, my father's role in my life and our family became much more significant. For example, he has been cooking for us for many months. He would follow a routine, letting my brother and me know if he needed anything or if he didn't need our help. I never realized how deeply my father loved my mother until now. These days, he calls me every day to check if I've eaten properly or if I need money. His care for us has increased. Things I used to be afraid to say in front of him, I can now express without fear (IH, a male participant).

As some fathers became deeply involved, some participants even perceived both fatherhood and motherhood in them. In these instances, fathers were able to effectively fill the role of mothers for the well-being of their children. For example;

Now, he is everything to me—both my father and mother. I want to give him every happiness in the world. After my mother's death, my father took on a more prominent role in my life, stepping up to fulfill both parental roles (FM, a female participant).

After my mother died, my father became my everything. At times, he doesn't even let me feel the absence of my mother---(SMS, a male participant).

The examples above indicate that these fathers took on a wide range of family responsibilities after the death of their wives or partners. They demonstrated sincere devotion and commitment to their children, standing by them steadfastly. They redefined their traditional notions of masculinity, moving towards a more flexible and supportive version.

4.4 The Extent of Family Supports to Fathers

Participants expressed that their fathers faced several challenges in expanding their role as fathers after the death of their mothers. In this regard, reactions were mixed concerning the support and cooperation from family members and relatives. Some fathers received adequate support from their families and relatives, while others did not receive much help. Given the critical nature of the situation, support and attention from

family members and relatives were crucial for fulfilling the unique responsibilities of fatherhood. The following are examples of both cooperation and lack thereof.

The reaction from my father's family after my mother's death was mixed. Some members offered him unconditional support and comforted him in his grief, while others appeared distant or unsure of how to help him cope. For instance, my aunt was very empathetic, staying with him for weeks to assist with household chores, while my uncle seemed distant, avoiding any discussion about the situation altogether. Overall, the responses varied, with some family members being more supportive than others (FM, a female participant).

When my mother passed away, my maternal grandparents were still alive, but my father did not receive the support he had expected from them during that difficult time. He had to manage everything on his own (TT, a female participant).

After my mother's death, the relationship between my father and my mother's family improved significantly, which hadn't been the case before. I noticed my father becoming very dependent on my maternal relatives, and in turn, they became very supportive and sincere towards him (SNP, a female participant).

In most cases, family members and in-laws suggested that the fathers remarry. They believed this would help normalize the situation and ensure better care for the children. A few examples of this are presented below.

There was pressure from the rest of the family for him to remarry, but he hasn't done so, nor is he considering it. He views this as part of the sacrifice he envisioned. For several months after my mother's death, he was uncertain about how to move forward and what the future held for us (IH, a male participant).

When my mother passed away, it left everyone in my father's family in shock, as she was the eldest daughter-in-law. One recurring piece of advice from my father's family was that he should remarry. They would often say, "You're not that old. You can remarry and find someone who can manage everything for you---(TT, a female participant).

The narratives above highlight that family members and relatives can provide crucial emotional support and practical assistance during times of grief and bereavement, as well as in helping fathers fulfill their parenting roles effectively. They can aid in the emotional recovery of those grieving. In a collectivist society like Bangladesh, family support and cooperation hold even greater significance. It is a society where women are traditionally trained in caregiving roles and men in providing for the family. When men are required to take on caregiving responsibilities, the support of others becomes essential. One notable suggestion for some fathers was to remarry, which culturally reflects the perception that men may be unsuited or less capable of taking on caregiving roles, as these are typically seen as more appropriate for women.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to capture and present specific aspects of fatherhood practices within the context of Bangladesh, highlighting the multi-dimensional roles fathers play. Each theme aligns with a specific research question posed in the study.

Exploring participants' memories of their mothers is crucial to understanding their attachment to their children. In a traditional society like Bangladesh, where parent-child bonds are strong, the involvement of both parents is vital in all aspects of children's lives. However, participants showed significant dependence on their

mothers, describing them as deeply involved in their lives. They emphasized the attention and attachment they received from their mothers, reflecting how central mothers were to their upbringing. These findings align with a study of marginalized children in the USA, which found that mothers provide essential motivation and emotional support to help children confront life's challenges, strengthen their sense of purpose, and offer guidance to meet their needs and aspirations (Konowitz et al., 2023). The death of a parent, especially a mother, can have severe consequences for children's lives, leading to social, psychological, emotional, and economic difficulties (Barclay & Hällsten, 2021). In rural Bangladesh, studies show that the death of a mother can critically affect the health and well-being of young children (Ronsmans et al., 2010). After such a loss, children often suffer from a lack of attention, love, guidance, and a sense of security. During these challenging times, the father's support becomes crucial. In this study, fathers emerged as the primary source of care and cooperation for their children. Therefore, remembering mothers also brings into focus the importance of fathers' engagement.

Participants also commented on how their fathers coped with grief after the death of their mothers, noting that their fathers struggled to adjust. These findings challenge the cultural belief that men are less affected by bereavement than women. Although men may not always acknowledge or seek help for their grief, they are deeply impacted by the loss of a spouse. Studies indicate that fathers who lose their partners are more vulnerable to depression and suicidal thoughts than women (United Nations, 2011). The "bereavement effect," where mortality rates increase after the death of a spouse, particularly affects men in the immediate aftermath (Espinosa & Evans, 2008). It is, therefore, essential for fathers to address grief and recovery so they can fulfill their responsibilities toward their children.

As fathers in this study recovered from their grief, they expanded their roles and responsibilities, balancing both "instrumental" and "expressive" roles. Instrumental roles, typically assigned to men, include providing income, protection, discipline, and moral education, while expressive roles, typically associated with women, involve caregiving, companionship, and emotional support (Bales & Parsons, 1956; Featherstone, 2009; Finley & Schwartz, 2006). Fathers' ability to balance these roles is evident across cultures, with examples showing their significant contributions to child development (e.g., Finley & Schwartz, 2006; Lamb, 2010; Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2019), underscoring the relevance of both traditional and modern family parenting practices (Mogro-Wilson, Loomis, Hayes, & Rojas, 2019).

Bangladeshi society is heavily family and kin oriented. People rely on family and kin for various aspects of life, including marriage, economic activities, socialization, identity formation, caregiving, and social security (Shah, Shahidullah, Sultana, & Shah, 2024). Therefore, grieving fathers often expect support from family members and relatives during stressful times. Some participants in the study reported receiving positive support from family, while others did not. These findings are consistent with a study by Benkel, Wijk, & Molander (2009), which found that grieving individuals whose loved ones died in palliative care expected and often received support from family and relatives. In contrast, not all family members consistently offer long-term assistance in times of need. For instance, Sapin, Widmer, & Iglesias (2016) found that family members initially support individuals with mental illness but gradually withdraw when long-term help is required.

Family members and relatives often suggested that widowed fathers remarry. Such a recommendation reflects a prevalent social norm in Bangladeshi society, where marriage is a stable institution that can help redistribute the burdens of fatherhood to women. Marriage provides financial security, psychological and social benefits, and promotes healthy behavioral patterns (Espinosa & Evans, 2008). It is also structured in a way that typically offers men more cultural, material, and social advantages (Dempsey, 2002).

The study highlights how fathers in Bangladesh, after the death of their wives, transform their traditional roles and deepen their relational engagement with their children, families, and communities. Fathers take on nurturing and caregiving roles typically associated with mothers, fostering stronger emotional bonds with their children and supporting their development through grief and adolescence. Extended family members sometimes assist or challenge these fathers, influencing family dynamics. However, fathers become central figures in their children's emotional coping, helping them navigate grief while adjusting to new responsibilities. This shift fosters deeper father-child connections and redefines family dynamics, challenging conventional gender roles, and highlights the support networks within families and communities.

5.4 Practical Implication

Although this study is limited in scope, the findings of this study are anticipated to offer valuable guidance for future interventions. They offer insights into how support systems can be designed to assist fathers in raising their motherless children. It informs the need for social policies aimed at supporting families led by widowed fathers. For example, the findings could inform the design of paternal leave policies or workplace flexibility specifically for single-father households in both public and private sectors, recognizing that these men are managing both domestic labor and professional duties. Family counselors can use these insights to develop grief-support modules that equip widowed fathers with emotional caregiving tools. In addition, caregiving NGOs could implement 'Fatherhood Engagement' programs to provide single fathers with the practical skills and peer networks necessary to raise motherless children effectively.

5.5 Theoretical Contribution

Given the significant gap in fatherhood studies in Bangladesh, this research contributes theoretically to developing a new perspective on fatherhood. It highlights the pivotal role of fathers as key agents in child care and in fostering a sense of family belonging. In a country like Bangladesh, where traditional masculine ideals often portray fathers solely as providers rather than as recipients of support, this represents a significant gap in service provision.

5.6 Limitations

This study included only 10 motherless young participants, all currently residing in the capital city of Bangladesh. Therefore, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to the larger population of Bangladesh. Since the study is specific to the context of Bangladesh, its application to a global context is also limited. However, generalization and broader applicability were not the study's aims. Instead, the goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of fatherhood within this unique population.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

In this study, young motherless adults shared their experiences of being raised by their fathers, along with other related challenges. Scholarly literature on this unique population is almost absent within the context of Bangladesh, making it important to highlight the experiences of families where children or young adults are being raised by widowed fathers.

As in many parts of the world, families in Bangladesh are undergoing significant changes, transformations, and integrations, leading to evolving cultural ideals and expectations of fatherhood. This small-scale study offers valuable insights

into how traditional and modern forms of fatherhood are blending, as seen through fathers' presence, caregiving, and material and financial contributions. Additionally, the study explores other factors that may influence fatherhood, such as the support of family members and relatives. This is particularly significant within the collectivist social fabric of Bangladesh. In this context, paternal caregiving is rarely performed in isolation; rather, it is embedded in a system of intergenerational support. Such a collective culture, the extended family acts as a vital safety net for widowed fathers.

Community organizations working on gender issues should consider expanding their focus to include men and issues of fatherhood. This would contribute to strengthening and stabilizing family structures by promoting more inclusive and supportive practices.

Further research is needed to integrate these findings into theoretical frameworks and evidence-based practices for fatherhood in Bangladesh. Furthermore, there is a need for broader investigations into how fatherhood experiences vary across different socio-economic, cultural, and geographic contexts within Bangladesh.

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