

## The Role of Fathers' Involvement in Parenting and Adolescent Social Harms: A Narrative Review

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** In today's society, the issue of fatherhood and involvement in the upbringing of children has been emphasized. The study aimed to investigate the impact of fathers' involvement in parenting on the social victimization of adolescents.

**Methods:** The present research utilized a narrative review methodology, with technical terms being explained at the beginning. Relevant sources were identified by conducting searches on reputable academic databases, including ISI Web of Knowledge, PubMed, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Ovid, Elsevier, SID, and Magiran, covering the period from 2000 to 2023. The search keywords encompassed various related themes, such as fatherhood, absent fathers, childrearing, adolescents, father involvement, engagement, social problems, and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT). Compilation procedures were conducted according to the SANRA checklist. In the initial search, 162 articles were obtained. After removing duplicates and evaluating their titles and abstracts, 9 articles were selected for the review.

**Results:** Based on the findings of this literature review, paternal involvement in child-rearing is shown to positively affect the intellectual, moral, and social development of adolescents. Conversely, the absence of a father figure has been linked to negative outcomes such as drug addiction, decreased academic performance in both school and university, anti-social attitudes, separation anxiety, aggression, feelings of insecurity, and negative thoughts in teenagers.

**Conclusion:** The involvement of fathers in upbringing of their children fosters critical thinking and reinforces children's empowerment in making pivotal decisions, while simultaneously acting as a safeguard against social risks.

**Keywords:** Fatherhood, Parenting, Social Harms

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## Introduction

Throughout history, the role of mothers has been characterized as child caregivers with responsibility of the upbringing and well-being of the child (1- 3). Meanwhile, fathers have traditionally been viewed as the patriarchs of the family, responsible for ensuring its security and providing for its basic needs, including procreation. However, the significance of the father-child relationship has primarily revolved around the son's imitation and absorption of masculine traits from his father, while also serving as a role model for the daughter's future relationships (4). Fatherhood has become a controversial topic in recent decades. Several studies have emphasized the complexity and diversity of paternal roles in postmodern society (5). It is hypothesized that fathers play a pivotal role in the development and well-being of their children. Fathers are crucially important in the lives of their offspring. They assume distinct roles as companions, caregivers, protectors, gender role models, moral guides, teachers, educators, and financial supporters (6). Qualitative interviews with fathers from various Western countries demonstrate that the current discourse surrounding nurturing fatherhood affects men's perceptions of their role as fathers by motivating them to increase their presence in their children's lives (7). New demographic research indicates that fatherhood is equally vital to the identity of this generation's fathers as it is to its mothers. According to a 2015 survey conducted in America, 57% of fathers reported that parenting is "very important" to their sense of self, a statistic comparable to 58% of mothers who reported the same (8). The role of fathers in comparison to mothers in parenting has not been extensively explored. However, numerous studies have unambiguously demonstrated the significance of paternal involvement in promoting the sound growth and welfare of children (9). This narrative on fatherhood exemplifies the claims made by social commentators regarding the importance of men's involvement in raising their children, alongside their other family responsibilities (8). During adolescence,

preventing social harm is crucial, since the desire to establish oneself and validate one's existence is a fundamental mental state for this period of life (10). Since young people are vital assets to any country and play a significant role in promoting continuity, dynamism, development, and authority, social harms affecting them pose a considerable challenge to the growth, flourishing of individual talents, and overall development of the nation (11). Social harms refer to a group of disorders and behavioral abnormalities exhibited by individuals or collectively by members of a society. These issues arise from irregularities and malfunctions in social phenomena, resulting in undesirable consequences. Such harms often cause psychological, physical, and material hardship for vulnerable sections of society. Since young people are the most vulnerable demographic, it is of utmost importance to address social harm and its prevention during adolescence and youth (12, 13). On the other hand, preventing crime and deviance to enhance the collective and family life environment is a simpler, more scientific, and less costly approach than treatment (14). According to social theorists, the family institution must take action to prevent social harm. Numerous factors contribute to social harm, such as economic and social inequalities, family financial status, unemployment, conflict between parents, educational practices of parents, and lack of awareness and adequate parental understanding of child-rearing (15) The study aimed to investigate the connection between fathers' active involvement in parenting and the likelihood of adolescents experiencing social victimization.

## Methods

This study employed a narrative review approach. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using various electronic databases, including ISI Web of Knowledge, PubMed, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Ovid, Elsevier, SID, and Magiran, covering the period from 2000 to 2023. Persian keywords like "fatherhood," "participation," "youth," "parenting," and "social

damage," along with English counterparts such as "fatherhood," "absent father," "childrearing," "adolescent," "father involvement," "engagement," and "social harms," were used with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT).

The SANRA checklist guided the compilation process, ensuring the study's purpose was clearly defined and facilitating the retrieval of relevant literature from credible sources. Inclusion criteria included publication between January 1st, 2000, and December 2020, peer-reviewed status, public availability, and focus on father involvement in parenting and adolescent social harms. Exclusion criteria encompassed manuscripts not published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., gray literature), articles addressing only one aspect (father involvement or adolescent social harms), publications in languages other than Persian or English, and unavailable full texts.

The study analyzed a diverse range of articles employing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The title and abstract of each retrieved

article were independently reviewed by the first and second authors, eliminating duplicates. Articles meeting the criteria were then subjected to a thorough review process, involving consultation with a third party for any disagreements. Relevant studies identified through the cited sources were also included.

Data extraction focused on author information, publication year, article title, and factors related to the role of fathers and social harm. Irrelevant and duplicate articles were excluded before analyzing the full text. Additionally, full texts deemed inaccessible, repetitive, short, conference abstracts, theses, letters to the editor, and case reports were excluded. This process led to the selection of 162 articles, from which 9 were chosen for in-depth study. Relevant information from these articles, including the title, first author's name, publication year, sample size, information collection tools, and final report results, were extracted and compiled (Figure 1).

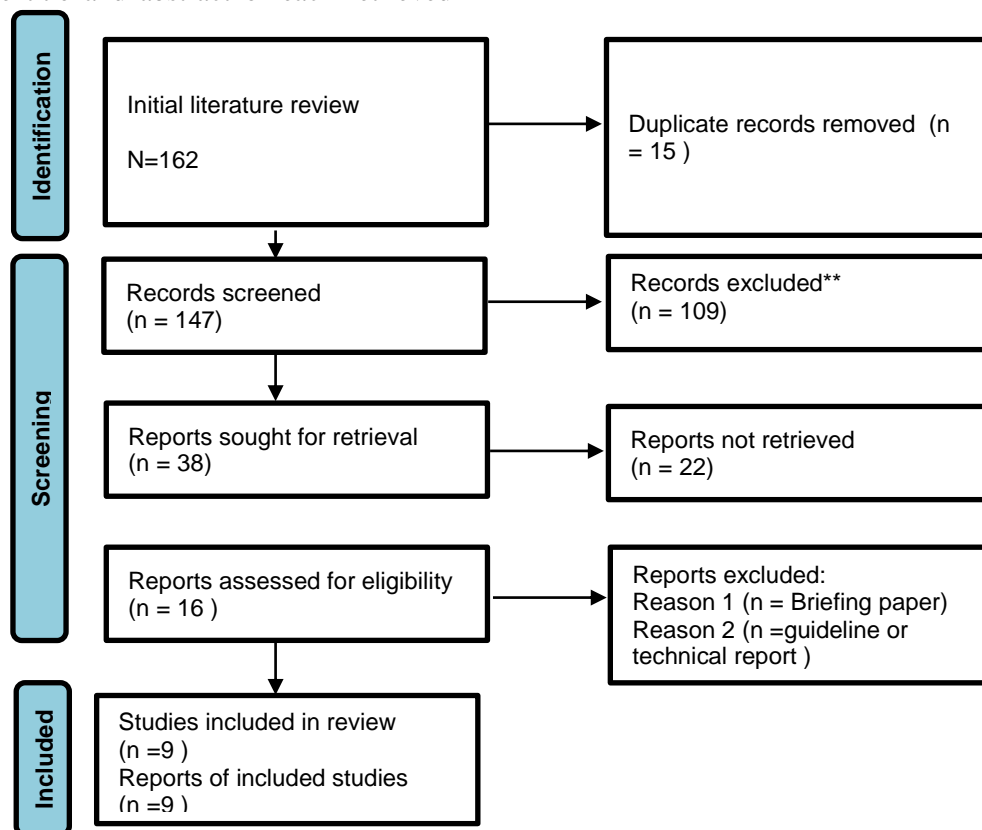


Figure 1. Flow diagram for included articles in the review

## Results

In recent years, studies on the impact and role of fathers' involvement in parenting have made significant progress. However, there is a lack of significant research on the role of fathers in preventing social harm among teenagers. This literature review aimed to identify significant outcomes of paternal involvement in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their offspring. This intention is to mitigate societal issues like sexual misconduct, substance abuse, deviant attitudes, aggressive behavior, and academic deficiencies. Given the extensive range of social problems, and the ambiguity surrounding their definition, consensus is lacking (10). Only some of the author's considerations have been included. It is worth noting that studies on the influence of a father's involvement in child-rearing have compared cases where the father is present and spends time with the children, versus cases where the so-called father may be involved for reasons such as employment, but is absent due to factors such as divorce, imprisonment, or death. This distinction is important, as a father's physical presence may be crucial in shaping a child's development.

### *Intercourse*

Father absence and the onset of sexual activity and teenage pregnancy among girls and found that girls who experienced father absence before age 5 were more likely to engage in sexual activity and become pregnant during adolescence than those who experienced father absence later but before age(16). The increased risk of early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy is directly correlated with the onset and duration of exposure to the father absence, with higher severity leading to a greater likelihood of these outcomes. Additionally, such risk is linked to other family traumas, behavioral issues, mental health struggles, and academic delays (17, 18). Fagan et al. (2024) reported that adolescents who experienced father absence during their growth and development have lower self-esteem, engage in sexual activities at a younger age, and achieve less compared to those whose

fathers were present. They noted that additional adverse factors, such as low socio-economic status, exacerbate these negative outcomes. Although lack of father involvement in child-rearing is recognized as a major risk factor for early sexual activity and pregnancy among adolescent girls, studies have shown that adolescent girls who are exposed to father absence, particularly at a young age, are at greater risk of early sexual activity and pregnancy. In addition, a protective factor against early sexual activity is father's presence and involvement in parenting (19). MK Lei et al. found a significant correlation between a father absence and drug addiction. Fathers' participation in parenting has a positive effect in deterring children from engaging in delinquent behaviors it is associated with reduced substance abuse among teenagers, and reduced rates of drug use, truancy, theft (20), and reduced use of alcohol and marijuana (21). Father involvement in parenting during the adolescent's 10th-grade year is linked to a reduction in problem behavior such as drug use, delinquency, and violent behavior in the subsequent year (22). The systematic review by Bozzini et.al. indicated that adolescents who spend more time with their fathers are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and use drugs (23). The association between peer substance use and marijuana use in adolescents is affected by both the proximity to their fathers and the belief that their parents hold them accountable for violating legal regulations (24). The association between peer substance use and marijuana use in adolescents is influenced by both the proximity to their fathers and the belief that their parents hold them accountable for violating legal regulations (24). Gaml-Sørensen, A., et al. conducted a research, which suggested that the absence of a father exposes adolescent girls to peer influence and negative behavioral choices. Frequent drug use among adolescent girls is positively related to peer influence. The presence of a father may protect against these vulnerabilities. A close and positive relationship between father and child predicts a lower risk of engaging in risky behavior for the first time (25).

### *Antisocial attitudes*

Father's involvement in parenting is positively related to children's overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and communication skills, which persists from early childhood to adolescence. According to social learning theory, a father's participation enhances adolescent social growth and social insight through learning and modeling (7, 26). Children with involved fathers in parenting tend to have more social interactions and demonstrate fewer negative emotive responses during play with peers. Additionally, they experience less tension in their relationships with other children and are more likely to independently resolve conflicts. Father's involvement in child-rearing can facilitate children's growth and maturity, fostering tolerance and patience in the face of life adversities (27). Thus, children with involved fathers tend to develop into well-socialized and successful adults (28). They also internalize moral values and compliance with laws (28). They are adept at adjusting to university life both personally and socially (29). Additionally, they tend to have

enduring and successful marriages, and are satisfied with their romantic partners in middle age, enjoy more fulfilling intimate relationships, and have lower rates of divorce (30). Similarly, young adults with sensitive fathers during early interactions possess a more secure and wholesome portrayal of their present romantic relationship. Notably, high levels of paternal involvement during childhood constitute the most potent predictor of empathic behavior among young people (31). Therefore, a father's intimacy and involvement significantly forecast children's moral involvement, leading to more favorable moral and social actions in boys and girls (32). The absence of a father has a strong correlation with the development of antisocial attitudes in adolescents. Adolescents without a father figure are more likely to engage in criminal activities and exhibit antisocial behaviors, which hinders their recognition of social norms and values (33). However, social experiences with fathers play a key role in dissuading teenagers from anti-social behaviors and attitudes (33).

**Table 1.** The characteristics of studies conducted on the role of fathers' involvement in parenting and adolescent social harms

Author and year of publication	Title	Sample size or the number of articles	Type of study	Country	Results
Bateson (2017) (34)	Engaging Fathers: Recognizing the Barriers	fifty peer-reviewed articles	Narrative review	England	<p>Father involvement in pregnancy, child-rearing, and beyond has potential benefits for families and children, including promoting positive effects on childhood cognitive development, academic progress, social competence, positive self-esteem, and reducing the occurrence of behavioral problems in adulthood.</p> <p>Therefore, fathers' participation in raising children can play a preventive role in social harm among teenagers.</p>
Lee (2011) (35)	Barriers for fathers to participate in family and parenting programs	17 participants	Qualitative (phenomenology)	the United States	<p>The study revealed that fathers' significant roles in their children's lives are often overlooked. Male participants of this research expressed their disapproval of disregarding the father's role in supporting their children. Male participants of this research expressed their disapproval of disregarding the father's role in supporting their children. Finding new approaches to engage fathers in child-rearing is advised. Male participants of this research expressed their disapproval of disregarding the father's role in supporting their children.</p> <p>It is crucial to enhance awareness of the father's role and develop policy and guidelines with plans to engage fathers, to better improve children's education and well-being.</p> <p>There may be potential to enhance father engagement in service provision by incorporating mentoring-based activities or specialized content on the role of fathers.</p> <p>Additionally, interventions could be developed to further leverage fathers' strengths, considering the prevalent usage of positive parenting strategies among fathers. Involving fathers in all stages of their children's lives and increasing joint work with fathers can positively impact father-child relationships and lead to improved outcomes for children, reducing their risk of experiencing social harm in adulthood.</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Sample size or the number of articles	Type of study	Country	Results
Cabrera (2000) (36)	Public policies and father participation	11 articles	Narrative review	the United States	<p>The research suggests a necessity to enhance the involvement of fathers in raising children. Policymakers should generate policies and programs that benefit families. The execution of a fatherhood plan and inter-organizational partnerships (private and public), involving an integrated knowledge base, will aid in designing superior policies and programs for fatherhood involvement, which necessitates further research.</p> <p>The recent increase in attention toward fathers' roles in their children's upbringing and well-being necessitates a reevaluation of societal and cultural notions of fatherhood. This cultural shift will significantly impact policies and research that investigate how parents, both mothers and fathers, can optimally facilitate their children's development, empowering them to become better parents and safeguarding them from socioemotional harm.</p>
Jukes (2022) (37)	Barriers and facilitators of participation of mothers and fathers In Family-Based Interventions: A Qualitative Systematic Review	It included 20 studies ranged from 5 to 41 participants in a primary parenting role, with a total of 345 parents across the studies	Systematic review	in multiple countries, including the UK, USA, Australia, Ireland, Sweden, and New Zealand	<p>The study findings indicate that limited opportunities for fathers to engage in family-oriented interventions act as obstacles to their involvement in children's lives. Notably, both mothers and fathers face similar challenges when addressing behavioral issues in children and adolescents. Thus, there is a need to focus on promoting father involvement in solving parenting and behavioral problems, which can enhance the development of children's life skills</p>
Ellis (2003) (38)	Does a father absence put girls at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy?	17 participants	Descriptive - cross-sectional	the United States and New Zealand	<p>Strong and consistent evidence indicates that the father absence is associated with an increased risk of early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy.</p> <p>The incidence rate of early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy was higher compared to other issues such as behavioral problems, mental health conditions, and academic achievement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the father absence is a significant risk factor for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. On the contrary, the presence of a father was a crucial factor in safeguarding against early sexual</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Sample size or the number of articles	Type of study	Country	Results
Castetter (2020) (39)	The effects of a father absence on a girl's growth and development throughout her life	19 studies	Systematic review	the United States	experiences, regardless of the presence of other risk factors. The age at which individuals initiated romantic relationships decreased as the level of father absence increased. These results strongly advocate for social policies promoting the father's role and involvement in child-rearing, especially regarding girls, as it facilitates their ability to combat social maladies in adulthood.  Research suggests that growing up without a father can have varying effects on girls and boys. Specifically, daughters who lack a father figure may face challenges in forming healthy heterosexual relationships, leading to what some have dubbed "father issue syndrome." The media has widely popularized this term. In addition, such girls may experience difficulties with early sexual development, poor mental health, and insecure attachment patterns. Although there is factual evidence that growing up without a father poses some challenges, it does not necessarily condemn girls. Girls raised without paternal support still have the potential to thrive and succeed.
Qureshi (2014) (40)	The effects of father absence on children's academic performance	The sample size for the United States data was 242 girls, and for the New Zealand data, it was 520 girls.	Descriptive - cross-sectional	the United States and New Zealand	A statistical analysis indicates that academic performance is better among children with present fathers (75%) than those without absent fathers(%) . Additionally, this study found that the academic achievement of female children is more significantly impacted by the absence of a father than male children. However, the presence of a father correlates with higher academic achievement for both sexes.
Sarkadi (2008) (6)	Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a	The sample size of the study included approximately 22,300 individual	systematic review		The study reviewed 24 articles that fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The results demonstrate that paternal involvement in parenting is linked to a reduction in various risky behaviors during adulthood, including smoking, aggression, delinquency, and financial troubles.

Author and year of publication	Title	Sample size or the number of articles	Type of study	Country	Results
	systematic review	datasets			<p>Additionally, a father's consistent and engaged interaction during childhood is a predictor of positive outcomes in adulthood.</p> <p>It seems that the father's participation is associated with reducing the frequency of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in girls.</p>
Rabani (2022) (41)	Consequences of increasing father's working hours on changing the quality of intergenerational relationships: a qualitative study	15 housewives	Qualitative Study	Iran	<p>The crucial implication of the study is the significant impact of a mother's involvement in the daily life and upbringing of her children. Due to the reduced presence and participation of fathers in the family, not only housewives face additional pressure to raise and care for the children, but the generational relationship patterns of the family are also affected, and the role of father in raising the next generation is marginalized. The conflict between the paternal and occupational roles of men reflects the traditional Iranian family breadwinner pattern, it is caused by increasing economic pressures on family welfare</p>

Adolescents who interact with their fathers during infancy and childhood show improved academic progress and get better grades while attending school (42). They have higher verbal skills, performance, and average in school (43). High academic motivation, valuing education, and prioritizing grades can lead to improved social-emotional functioning. Children who interact with their fathers tend to exhibit greater cognitive competence, higher IQs, and greater enjoyment of school on standardized intelligence assessments (44). They have a positive attitude toward school, participate in extracurricular activities, have fewer school absences, and are less likely to fail a grade, be suspended or expelled, or have behavioral problems at school (45). Positive paternal involvement increases economic achievement, career success and competence, educational outcomes, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (46). The low level of education in childhood and adolescence directly correlates with antisocial behavior and conflicts with law enforcement during adolescence (47). Chung et al. (2020) and Flouri E et al. (2003) found that parental communication independently predicted academic achievement up to age 20 for both males and females. This implies that early and sustained fatherly involvement in parenting could serve as a significant protective measure in the prevention of social damage amidst risky circumstances (48, 49).

### **Aggression**

Children's emotional-social growth is impacted by the absence of their father. The study conducted by Lanahan et al. (2013) revealed that adolescents who lived with fathers experienced positive emotional growth, and the results also demonstrated the positive impact of father involvement on adolescent emotional development (50). Involvement of fathers in parenting, as gauged by their frequency of contact and quality of relationship with their children, is linked with a reduction in externalizing and internalizing symptoms, including disruptive behavior, antisocial conduct, depression, sadness, falsehoods,

and hostility (51, 52). A study by Qureshi et al. (2022) in Pakistan showed how father involvement in child-rearing sparks moral and social development. Adolescents exposed to absent fathers exhibit separation anxiety, aggression, insecurity, and negative ideation. Results revealed that paternal involvement has a positive correlation with psychological resilience and a negative association with aggression (40). Father involvement during the age of seven to sixteen may prevent later psychological problems in children, particularly for females (53).

### **Discussion**

According to the review's findings, fathers' participation in every stage of their children's lives can positively impact father-child relationships and yield improved outcomes for children (54). It fosters the intellectual, moral, and social growth of adolescents. When father is absent, it can lead to drug addiction, decreased academic performance, anti-social behavior, anxiety about separation, aggression, insecurity, and negative thinking (40, 55).

According to Hirschi, increased solidarity among youth, parents, and families leads to greater interest in society and engagement in socially acceptable activities. Consequently, the likelihood of participating in abnormal behavior decreases (56). In a study by Bateson et al., it was concluded that men desire suitable educational opportunities to comprehend their role as fathers and effectively address physical, mental, and emotional needs of their children (35). Therefore, it is advisable to provide fathers with relevant training before deciding to have a child and continue the same during and after pregnancy. Training of fathers during this phase has tremendous potential to enhance not only paternal skills but also benefit the family. Ultimately, children gain the most benefits from such training initiatives. This early and timely involvement leads to positive results in childhood cognitive development, academic advancement, social competence, and self-esteem, as well as a reduced incidence of behavioral issues and improved critical thinking abilities in

adulthood (34). On the other hand, contemporary boys and girls are raised with distinct self-expectations, acquired through a combination of direct experiences, media portrayal, and ever-evolving organizational structures. These factors indicate that fathers are increasingly important in child-rearing, as future roles and expectations continue to transform.

A study conducted by Malonda et al. (2019) proved that those girls who share their social experiences with their fathers are protected from antisocial behavior and social harm (47). In Zimmerman's study, children who spend more time with fathers have fewer behavioral problems in adolescence, such as substance abuse, delinquency, and violent behavior, compared to children of absent fathers (57). The Flory and Buchanan (2003) study demonstrated that children whose fathers spent more time with them starting at age 7 and had positive relationships with them had a lower likelihood of experiencing emotional and psychological disorders at age 16. Moreover, at age 33, these children were less susceptible to mental stress (48). Research has shown that in families where father was absent and "absent father" was influenced by emotions of mother and baby, delinquency, substance abuse, behavioral problems, suicide, and heart disease were more prevalent due to severe stress of adolescent and teenage years, resulting in more social damage (58). Fathers engaged in two-way interaction and communication with their children and involved in parenting offer greater opportunities for the development of their children's talents and abilities. Additionally, this engagement fosters critical thinking, role-playing, and interaction with other members of society, as well as sound decision-making in situations of heightened risk, thereby mitigating potential social harm (59). One of the limitations of the present study was the non-use of articles from some scientific databases due to the lack of free access, as well as the lack of access to the full file of some articles and the lack of exclusive articles on fathers' involvement in parenting and adolescent social harms in this field.

## Conclusion

Absence of father, due to separation, divorce, death, or other circumstances, can significantly affect a child's psychological and social development. Studies have shown an increased risk of behavioral issues like aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse, emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and relationship challenges, as well as academic problems including lower performance and higher dropout rates. The impact of father absence can extend beyond adolescence, influencing adult relationships, mental health, and even physical well-being.

Active father involvement offers many benefits, promoting positive physical health, emotional security, and social skills. Recognizing the importance of fathers in child-rearing and preventing social harm, multi-dimensional and comprehensive interventions are crucial. These include social programs like support groups, workshops, and parent education programs, equipping fathers with skills and resources. Positive media portrayals of involved fathers can challenge stereotypes and encourage greater participation. While father absence can have detrimental effects on children, active father involvement can significantly contribute to a child's well-being and development. Supporting fathers through policy, programs, and social change is critical to creating a more just and supportive environment for families.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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## Ethical Considerations

In searching and writing the article, all ethical

principles have been observed.

We did not have financial resources for this research. Due to the review nature of the study and the absence of any intervention on the research participants, it does not have a code of ethics. However, all the rules of research ethics have been observed and are clearly stated in the methodology section.

### Code of Ethics

The ethics registry code in this research is IR.MUI.NUREMA.REC.1401.143

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to conception, design,

and definition of the intellectual content of the study; Search articles by M. M, F. M and Z. B; all authors participated in data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript drafting, and M. Z, SH. K, Z. B, and M. M provided critical revisions. The final draft of the manuscript was reviewed and approved by all authors.

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