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Fatherhood between Scripture and Society: Examining Religious and External Influences

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Abstract

Fathers today face increasing pressures from work, society, and changing family expectations. In such circumstances, the need for guidance, emotional support, and a redefined sense of responsibility is felt more than ever. This study conducts a comparative textual analysis of fatherhood in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Bible, integrating Pleck's Involved Fatherhood framework with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory. Through comparative content analysis of sacred texts, it examines themes such as spouse selection, the wife's role in supporting fatherhood, and external influences on paternal responsibilities. The Qur'an articulates the primary religious and moral duties of fathers, while the Hadith expands these through prescriptive and illustrative guidance. Biblical perspectives are analysed in relation to Qur'anic and Hadith teachings to reveal areas of overlap in paternal ideals as well as

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distinct theological and practical emphases. Findings show that while all three emphasise provision, moral instruction, and emotional engagement, the Qur'an–Hadith relationship uniquely integrates universal theological principles with context-specific behavioural models.

Keywords

Islamic Parenting, Christian Parenting, Fathering in the Quran, Fathering in the Bible, Fathering in Hadith, Bioecological Perspective on Fatherhood.

Introduction[1]

The long-term negative consequences of father absence—such as emotional insecurity, behavioral problems, and academic challenges in children—have made the role of fathers a critical issue today (Lee, Pace, Lee, & Knauer, 2018; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). As Pope Francis highlighted, "a society without fathers is a society of orphans" (Catholic News Agency, 2015), emphasizing the profound impacts of absent or disengaged fathers. Historically, fathers were regarded chiefly as financial providers (Mavungu, 2013), yet contemporary research highlights their vital role in fostering children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. Cabrera et al. (2000) note that evolving family structures, increased maternal labor force participation, and cultural diversity have transformed fatherhood, highlighting the importance of paternal involvement for supporting children's well-being.

Understanding the consequences of father absence raises a crucial question: what factors influence fathers' engagement, and how can we foster a more active involvement by fathers?

Fatherhood practices vary widely across cultural traditions, economic circumstances, and neighborhood settings, challenging common negative stereotypes about non-White fathers. Just as masculinities are diverse, so too are fatherhoods: men approach parenting in ways shaped by their family background, economic status, community environment, available support, and levels of stress (Hofferth, 2000).

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This study draws on bioecological systems theory to examine these broader factors, emphasizing how religious, social, cultural and structural contexts collectively shape paternal roles (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Based on these insights, it is reasonable to suggest that educating men, providing social support, and improving economic structures could foster more involved and responsible fathers. Religious traditions further reinforce these responsibilities; Islamic and Christian texts highlight the moral and spiritual value of engaged fatherhood, which will be discussed in detail in this article.

Fatherhood is a fundamental aspect of both Islamic and Christian teachings. The Quran and the Bible offer divine guidance that transcends mere cultural norms, providing a purposeful framework for paternal responsibility. While many cultures emphasize financial provision, these holy scriptures highlight the father's role as a moral guide, mentor, and nurturer, ensuring the holistic development of their children. In a world where many men lack formal parenting education beyond societal expectations, these teachings serve as an invaluable resource, filling the gaps left by cultural traditions. By drawing on these teachings, Muslim and Christian communities—together comprising approximately 3.8 billion people worldwide—can educate and empower fathers, equipping them with the knowledge and responsibility necessary to cultivate stronger, more balanced families rooted in love, wisdom, and faith.

This paper aims to explore the following research questions:

1. What theological principles and prescriptions regarding fatherhood are articulated in the Qur'an and hadith?
2. In what ways do the Qur'anic and Hadith perspectives on fatherhood differ in emphasis, scope, or detail, and how are they complementary or mutually reinforcing?

3. What teachings on fatherhood are found in the Bible, and how do they compare to Islamic sources?
4. How can scriptural models of fatherhood (Islamic and Christian) be applied to contemporary discussions on paternal involvement, family relationships, and child-rearing in both religious and secular contexts?
5. According to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, how do cultural, community, and family structures interact with religious ideals to shape fatherhood practices today?
6. How does Pleck's Involved Fatherhood framework align with or diverge from the paternal roles described in the Qur'an, Hadith, and Bible?

This study employs a comparative analytical approach, examining the Quran, Hadith, and the Bible as primary sources to explore the concept of fatherhood. The research involves a systematic review of verses, narratives, and theological interpretations pertinent to paternal roles within both religious traditions. Additionally, scholarly commentaries, sociological research, and psychological studies are incorporated to provide further insights and contextual depth.

Historically, theories of child development and parenting largely emphasized mother-centered perspectives, positioning fathers primarily as financial providers and external figures in child development. Early anthropological and sociological studies reinforced this notion, portraying motherhood as central to caregiving while overlooking the father's role in shaping a child's emotional, social, and moral development (Roopnarine & Yildirim, 2019). However, recent decades have witnessed a growing global focus on paternal involvement, driven by evolving gender roles, workplace equality policies, parental leave reforms, and increased recognition of fathers'

contributions to family well-being (Heilman et al., 2017; Levtov et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2015).

Efforts to quantify paternal involvement have often been limited by a focus on time allocation rather than the quality of father-child interactions. Pleck's (2010) research marked a shift in focus toward the nature and impact of fathers' engagement, arguing that the amount of time fathers spend with their children does not necessarily correlate with developmental outcomes. His revised framework of involved fatherhood introduced a qualitative dimension, emphasizing warmth, sensittivity, and paternal control (Rohner, 2016; Sorkhabi, 2005).

This article builds upon Pleck's (2010) model of involved fatherhood to analyze paternal roles in Islamic and Christian traditions. This framework initially identified three key dimensions of fatherhood, including positive engagement in activities, which involve direct interaction with the child, such as caregiving, play, and shared activities that promote development; accessibility (availability to the child) and responsibility (Lamb et al, 1985). The framework later evolved to include more qualitative aspects of father-child interaction and focused on positive engagement activities, interaction with the child of the more intensive kind likely to promote development, expressions of affection, and control and monitoring, which encompasses parental supervision, decision-making in the child's life, and guidance in behavioral development.

Additionally, Pleck outlines indirect care, which includes responsibilities that contribute to child-rearing without direct interaction, such as arranging for healthcare, education, and financial planning, as well as process responsibility, which highlights a proactive role in parenting, recognizing and addressing the child's needs rather than waiting for external prompts (Doucet, 2006). This framework is used to classify fatherhood involvement as depicted in

scriptural teachings, examining paternal expectations related to marital relationships, emotional availability, material provision, play, prayer, moral and spiritual guidance, and role modeling. At the conclusion of the study, we will assess how these paternal roles align with or diverge from Pleck's framework.

While Pleck's model provides a structured classification of fatherhood involvement, this study also incorporates the bioecological systems' theories of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022) to explore the broader factors influencing fatherhood in religious traditions. This framework shifts the focus from individual father-child interactions to the larger systems that shape paternal roles, emphasizing the religious, cultural, and structural influences on fatherhood.

This approach is particularly relevant in understanding how Islamic and Christian teachings on fatherhood interact with societal expectations, family structures, and government policies. At the most immediate level, the microsystem involves direct father-child relationships, including emotional availability, play, and caregiving. The mesosystem extends to the influence of marriage, spousal support, and religious institutions in shaping a father's role within the family. The exosystem encompasses external factors such as workplace policies, economic pressures, and community expectations regarding paternal involvement, all of which can either support or hinder a father's ability to fulfill his parenting duties. At a broader level, the macrosystem comprises the overarching cultural and religious frameworks that define the father's role, including scriptural guidance on leadership and spiritual upbringing. Finally, the chronosystem accounts for how fatherhood has evolved over time, particularly in response to societal shifts in gender roles and parental responsibilities.

By integrating Pleck's (2010) framework of involved fatherhood to classify fatherhood involvement and Bronfenbrenner & Morris's (2006) Bioecological Model of human development to examine the broader factors shaping paternal roles, this study provides a comprehensive perspective on religious fatherhood. The analysis bridges scriptural teachings with contemporary sociological and psychological insights, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how Islamic and Christian traditions define fatherhood and how external influences such as culture, community, and legal structures impact paternal responsibilities.

The Quran and the Bible both emphasize the essential role of fathers in providing, guiding, and nurturing their children. In the Quran, fathers are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring their family's well-being (Al-Baqarah 2:233) and imparting moral and spiritual values (Ash-Shu'ara: 214-215). The wisdom of Luqman highlights the importance of ethical teaching and righteous living (Luqman:12-19). Similarly, the Bible calls fathers to raise their children in God's ways (Ephesians 6:4), offering instruction and discipline grounded in wisdom and righteousness (Proverbs 1:8; 4:1-4). The teachings of Jesus further emphasize compassionate fatherhood, reflecting God's loving nature (Luke 11:11-13; Matthew 7:9-11).

Understanding the perspectives on fatherhood in the Quran, Hadith, and Bible, as well as the factors influencing paternal roles, is significantly important. This study enriches scholarly knowledge by examining the religious foundations and teachings that define fatherhood, and by exploring the external influences that shape paternal responsibilities. Due to the scope of this research, the study does not examine government policies or economic factors. Instead, it focuses on how family dynamics—including a man's spouse and extended family—as well as religious communities and prominent

religious figures, impact paternal performance. By analyzing the similarities and differences in these descriptions and considering the role of family and religious influences on paternal responsibilities, this study offers a deeper understanding of the complex and evolving nature of fatherhood within religious and social contexts.

1. The Quranic Perspective on Fatherhood: Key Principles of Involved Fatherhood

In Islamic theology, the concept of fatherhood holds great significance and is rooted in the Quran, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (S), and the conduct of the Shia Imams. These sacred sources define a father's roles, responsibilities, and moral obligations. The Qur'an establishes the foundational vision of fatherhood in Islam, outlining broad moral, spiritual, and social responsibilities such as provision, guidance, and moral example. The Hadith literature builds upon this foundation, translating these principles into tangible, everyday practices through the Prophet's and his progeny's own words and actions. While the Qur'an offers the overarching framework, the Hadith provides the lived blueprint, making the two sources not only complementary but inseparable in forming a holistic Islamic model of paternal responsibility.

As part of the macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, a father's religious beliefs shape his sense of accountability, reinforcing his role in both the material and spiritual upbringing of his children (Tong & An, 2024).

The Quran and Islamic teachings recognize the pivotal role of fathers in the procreation and holistic development of their children. The Quran emphasizes the obligation of fathers to ensure their family's material well-being, as illustrated in *Surah Talaq* (65:6), where financial support (*nafaqah*) is mandated even in cases of

divorce. Beyond material provision, Islam underscores the importance of emotional connection and support, with Prophet Muhammad stating, “The most faithful of people is the one who has the best character and is the kindest to his family, and I am the kindest among you to my family”. (*Ibn Bābawayh* (AS), Vol. 2, p. 38, Hadith 109) This guidance encourages fathers to cultivate loving and caring relationships, promoting an atmosphere of trust and affection.

Additionally, fathers are called upon to impart religious and ethical knowledge, teaching their children wisdom and responsibility towards Allah and humanity, as exemplified in the advice of Luqman to his son (Luqman: 13-19). Imam Sajjad (AS), the 4th Shia Imam, emphasizes in his *Treatise on Rights* the father's responsibility in raising children with good morals. He states that a child is a reflection of the father’s guidance, both in good and bad deeds. The father must educate the child in proper conduct, guide them toward obedience to God, and be accountable for their upbringing, knowing he will be rewarded or held accountable for his actions.

In Islam, the primary responsibility for raising children lies with the father, as he is considered the head of the household and ultimately accountable for the family’s well-being. While the father retains his role as the primary guardian and decision-maker, he may entrust specific responsibilities—such as educational and moral guidance—to the mother, other relatives, or trusted individuals. This structure allows for a more comprehensive approach to child-rearing, while ensuring that the father retains his central role in the child's upbringing and is held accountable for their welfare.

By fulfilling the following obligations, involved fathers foster an environment conducive to the positive development of their children and the strength of the family unit, ensuring the nurturing of well-rounded individuals and future generations:

2. Thoughtful Spousal Selection and Establishing a Positive Marital Relationship: A Foundation for Involved Fatherhood

The concept of fatherhood, as outlined in Islamic teachings, begins even before marriage. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) imparted enduring wisdom in his saying: "تَزَوَّجُوا فِي الْحُجْزِ الصَّالِحِ فَإِنَّ الْعِرْقَ دَسَّاسٌ" ("Marry into good and virtuous families, for lineage has a lasting impact"). This guidance emphasizes that fatherhood starts with the careful choice of a spouse, as the character of a family profoundly affects future generations. By prioritizing integrity and virtue, prospective fathers lay the groundwork for a legacy rooted in foresight and responsibility. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, the spousal relationship functions within the microsystem, serving as a primary influence on a father's involvement in parenting. As one of the closest interpersonal interactions, it directly impacts a father's ability to fulfill his paternal responsibilities, shaping his level of engagement, emotional availability, and role within the family structure (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Islamic teachings highlight that a strong and compassionate marital bond is central to effective fatherhood. Imam Baqir (AS) narrates that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said: Gabriel (peace be upon him) counseled me so extensively about women that I thought they should not be divorced except in the case of clear adultery. This narration underscores the esteemed position of women within the family and the respect, dignity, and honor a husband is obliged to show his believing wife. (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, 1993, Vol. 3, p. 440)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the right of a child upon their father, highlighting the importance of respecting and honoring the child's mother: "The right of a child upon their father is that... if she is a daughter, he should honor her mother..." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2009a). Furthermore, the Quran in Surah An-Nisa (An-Nisa:19)

advises treating one's wife with kindness and fairness, stating: "And live with them (your wives) in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good." This verse reflects the integral role a harmonious spousal relationship plays in fostering a nurturing family environment, which in turn benefits children.

Research consistently shows that the quality of parents' marital relationship plays a crucial role in child development. Children whose parents experienced consistently poor marital quality exhibited more internalizing and externalizing problems, poorer health, lower math and vocabulary scores, and lower-quality home environments compared to children of parents in higher-quality marriages (James et al, 2022). For mothers, higher satisfaction, reduced conflict, and better communication were linked to secure attachment and less dependency in children, while for fathers, higher premarital conflict and poorer communication were associated with increased child dependency. These findings underscore the importance of a healthy, supportive relationship both before and after the child's birth in promoting positive outcomes for children[1]. (Howes & Markman, 1989).

The Supporting Healthy Marriages (SHM) project in the US offered relationship education to over 600 financially disadvantaged couples, focusing on communication, conflict resolution, and relationship enhancement. Evaluations conducted when their children were 12- and 30-months old revealed that participating fathers reported enhanced relationship satisfaction and reduced issues related to

1. Thirty-nine parents (from 20 families) with children aged 1 to 3 years participated in the study by completing assessments of marital satisfaction, conflict, and communication at two points in time: before marriage and 3 to 5 years after the birth of their child.

substance use compared to the control group. Additionally, couple and relationship skills education programs, as seen in studies, had positive effects on co-parenting, communication, and relationship quality (Lundquist et al., 2014; Stanley et al., 2014).

3. Material Provision

The Quran recognizes fathers as providers for their families, emphasizing their responsibility to ensure the material and financial well-being of their children. Fathers are encouraged to strive for sustenance through lawful means and to fulfill the basic needs of their families.

The Quran emphasizes the shared responsibility of parents in nurturing their children, as highlighted in Surah (Al-Baqarah: 233):

> "Mothers may breastfeed their children for two whole years, for those who wish to complete the nursing. The father is responsible for their provision and clothing in a fair manner. No soul is burdened beyond its capacity. Neither the mother nor the father should be made to suffer because of their child..."

This verse highlights the complementary responsibilities of both parents in ensuring the child's well-being. While mothers are primarily responsible for nurturing the child through breastfeeding, fathers are tasked with providing the material needs, such as food and clothing, to support this process. The verse also stresses fairness and compassion, ensuring that neither parent is overburdened or harmed in fulfilling their duties, emphasizing the balanced and shared approach to parenting in Islam.

Surah (Talaq: 6) emphasizes the responsibility of fathers to financially support their pregnant ex-wives during the ‘Iddah (waiting period in divorce), ensuring they are housed and provided for

according to the father's means. This commandment seeks to prevent the feminization of poverty and alleviate the financial burdens often imposed on women and children during divorce. Additionally, fathers are instructed to avoid causing harm to the mother or child in any way. The waiting period ends upon the woman's delivery, and if she chooses to breastfeed, the father must compensate her. Regarding decisions about the child, the parents should consult one another with respect and courtesy. In practice, however, divorce often breeds animosity between spouses, leading to further harm for the children and exacerbating an already difficult situation.

4. The Importance of Lawful Sustenance in Fatherhood

Although fathers are responsible for providing for their young children, it is impermissible to sustain them with ill-gotten wealth. Imam Sadiq (AS) cautioned: «كَسبُ الحَرام يَبينُ فِي الذُّرِيَّةِ» (The effects of unlawful earnings manifest in one's descendants.) This teaching underscores the long-lasting consequences of using illicit means for provision. (Al-Kulayni, 1984, Vol. 5, p. 125).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated: « مَنْ طَلَبَ [الرِّزْقَ فِي] الدُّنْيَا اسْتِعْفَافاً عَنِ النَّاسِ وَ تَوْسِيعاً عَلَى أَهْلِهِ ... لَقِيَ اللهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَ وَجْهُهُ مِثْلُ الْقَمَرِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ» (Whoever seeks sustenance in this world to remain independent of others and to provide comfort for his family will meet Allah Almighty on the Day of Resurrection with his face shining like the full moon.) (Al-Kulayni, 1984, Vol. 5, p. 78).

Furthermore, Imam Reza (AS) highlights the obligation of those blessed with wealth to be generous towards their family, stating: « يَنْبَغِي لِلرَّجُلِ أَنْ يُوَسِّعَ عَلَى عِيَالِهِ لِئَلاَّ يَتَمَنَّوْا مَوْتَهُ » (It is appropriate for a man to be generous towards his family so that they do not wish for his death.) (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 68).

5. Emotional Availability

One of the most significant responsibilities of fatherhood is the expression of love and affection toward children. Imam Sadiq (AS) narrates a profound conversation between Prophet Musa (AS) and Allah: « قَالَ مُوسَى بْنُ عِمْرَانَ ع يَا رَبِّ أَيُّ الْأَعْمَالِ أَفْضَلُ عِنْدَكَ فَقَالَ حُبُ الْأَطْفَالِ فَإِنِّي فَطَرْتُهُمْ عَلَى تَوْحِيدِي» ("Moses, son of Imran, said: O Lord, which deed is most superior in Your sight? Allah replied: Loving children, for I have created them upon My oneness."). (al-Barqī, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 293) This narration highlights that the love for children is not just a noble act but a reflection of their divine nature, which is inherently inclined toward Allah's oneness. By showing love and affection, fathers fulfill their divine responsibility and create an environment that nurtures their children with compassion, faith, and a deeper sense of alignment with Allah's oneness and divine purpose.

Expressing love to one's child and engaging in acts such as kissing them serves as a tangible demonstration of emotional availability because these gestures convey affection, warmth, and attentiveness. Emotional availability refers to a parent's ability to be present, responsive, and connected to their child's emotional needs. When a father openly expresses love, it sends a powerful message of acceptance and support, fostering a sense of security and trust in the child.

Kissing a child is not merely a physical act but a symbolic gesture of care and bonding. It demonstrates that the parent values and cherishes the child, reinforcing their emotional well-being. Such actions help children feel seen, loved, and prioritized, which are critical components of a nurturing parent-child relationship.

The importance of kindness and love for children is so paramount in Islam that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) equated it

with true faith. He said: «لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْ صَغِيرَنَا وَ لَمْ يُوَقِّرْ كَبِيرَنَا.» ("He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young and does not respect our elders.") (Tabarsi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 168). Among the various forms of expressing love, special emphasis has been placed on kissing one's children. The Prophet (PBUH) stated: « مَنْ قَبَّلَ وَلَدَهُ كَتَبَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ لَهُ حَسَنَةً» ("Whoever kisses their child, Allah the Almighty writes a good deed for them.") (Al-Kulaynī, Al-Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 49). Such acts of affection are encouraged as they strengthen the bond between parent and child while simultaneously earning divine rewards.

It is every child's right to be nourished with the love and care of their parents. The absence of affection, whether through neglect or deliberate coldness, can have dire consequences for both the child and the parents. Imam Sadiq (AS) narrated: « جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ ص فَقَالَ لَهُ مَا قَبَّلْتُ صَبِيّاً قَطُّ فَلَمَّا وَلَّى قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ ص هَذَا رَجُلٌ عِنْدَنَا أَنَّهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ النَّارِ» ("A man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, 'I have never kissed a child.' When the man left, the Prophet said, 'This man is among the people of Hellfire in our view.") (Majlisī, 1985, Vol. 13, p. 227). This powerful narration serves as a reminder of the spiritual and moral weight of a father's love, emphasizing that such expressions of kindness are not only crucial for the well-being of children but also for the eternal salvation of parents.

The conversation between Luqman and his son mentioned in the Quran (Luqman: 12-19) indeed demonstrates the love, care, and kindness of Luqman towards his son. Luqman imparts valuable advice and wisdom to his son, using the term "my son" (or "O my son") multiple times throughout the verses, which signifies his affectionate and paternal approach.

While the Quran does not include all of Luqman's specific words to his son, it portrays a conversation imbued with wisdom, care, and guidance. Luqman's advice addresses essential aspects of life,

including devotion to Allah, moral integrity, the avoidance of wrongdoing, and humility. The loving and compassionate nature of their relationship is reflected in the gentle tone of his counsel, as he begins with, 'O my son,' emphasizing the closeness and concern inherent in their dialogue.

Another instance of fatherly love in the Quran is Prophet Ya'qub's (Jacob) deep bond with his son Yusuf (Joseph), a relationship highlighted in Surah Yusuf (12). The Quranic narrative highlights the rich emotional bond between father and son through various events — such as the jealousy of Yusuf's brothers (Yusuf: 5, 8,17) and the tragic incident of Yusuf's apparent loss — which caused Jacob to grieve for years, even to the point of losing his sight. (Al-Inshiqaq: 12). This emotional attachment was not based on superficial or futile reasons, but rather on the exceptional virtues and unique qualities that Jacob recognized in Yusuf (Al-An'am: 12). As a wise and spiritually perceptive father, Jacob saw in his son qualities which set him apart from his brothers. For instance, Yusuf's dream, where celestial bodies prostrated to him (An-Nisa: 12), was a symbol of his future greatness and the special place he held in his father's heart.

In contemporary contexts, such as in Sweden, the principle of emotional availability and caregiving is reflected in parental leave policies, which can be understood within the exosystem of bioecological systems' theories of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The exosystem includes external structures and policies that shape fatherhood by influencing the conditions under which fathers engage in parenting. Sweden grants fathers parental leave based on the belief that parenting should not rest solely on mothers and that fathers should equally engage in caregiving from birth. By implementing such policies, governments aim to reshape societal attitudes toward fatherhood and encourage men to take on a more active role in child-

rearing. However, despite offering a generous one-year paid leave for childcare, only 5% of fathers have utilized it, leading the government to consider making such leave mandatory to ensure that policy efforts translate into real changes in paternal involvement (Gardner, 2017, p. 114). This reflects how structural interventions alone may not be sufficient to shift deep-seated cultural attitudes toward fatherhood and must be accompanied by broader social and familial acceptance of paternal engagement.

6. Playing with the Child

Fathers' active participation in play during a child's early years plays a pivotal role in fostering their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Research underscores the profound benefits of such interactions, highlighting the importance of nurturing positive and playful engagements. To maximize these advantages, it is imperative for policymakers and practitioners to create initiatives and resources that empower both fathers and mothers to engage meaningfully with their infants, thereby contributing to healthier and more well-rounded development (Amodia-Bidakowska et al, 2020).

Islamic teachings place great emphasis on the value of playing with children as a way to foster love, respect, and emotional connection. It is narrated that whenever the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) returned from a journey and encountered children, he would stop to engage with them. He would embrace some, place others on his back or shoulders, and instruct his companions: “Carry the children and let them sit on your shoulders.” The Prophet’s playful interactions with his son Ibrahim and Imam Hussain (AS), such as seating them on his knees and kissing them, exemplify his deep affection and the significance he placed on connecting with children through play.

Islamic teachings also highlight the developmental importance of play. Imam Musa al-Kadhim (AS) stated that playful children grow into patient adults, while Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) advised allowing children to play freely until the age of seven (Al-Kāfī, Vol. 6, p. 51, as cited in Mohammadi Rey Shahri, 2009). Play is more than mere recreation; it is a fundamental element of lifelong learning and growth. The Prophet's example—pausing to honor and engage with children and encouraging others to do the same—offers a timeless model for nurturing emotional and cognitive development through the simple yet profound act of play.

7. Praying for Righteous Children

A devoted father's perspective extends beyond the present, considering the well-being of his children long before their conception and into future generations. This foresight is captured in the Qur'anic verse:

> "Our Lord! Grant us joy and comfort in our spouses and offspring, and make us leaders of the Godwary." (Al-Furqan: 74).

This verse reflects the deep anticipation and preparation of the righteous for their descendants, emphasizing a desire for harmony and piety within the family. Similarly, Prophet Ibrahim's supplication highlights this commitment:

> "Lord, make me steadfast in prayer, and from my descendants as well. Our Lord, accept my supplication." (Ibrahim: 40).

The importance of prayers is further underscored by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who said: "The prayer of a parent for their child is like the prayer of a prophet for their nation." (Tabarsi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 282) Additionally, the Prophet (PBUH) stated: "May Allah have mercy on a person who helps their child in righteousness by forgiving

their faults and praying for them in private." (Al-Majlisī, Vol. 104, p. 98, Hadith 70). This highlights the immense spiritual significance of a parent's supplication and forgiveness for their children.

Imam Sajjad (AS), in his supplication to Allah regarding his children, expressed profound prayers, saying:

> "O Allah, favor me by preserving my children, granting them righteousness, and making them a source of benefit for me. Lengthen their lives and increase their years, nurture their young, strengthen their weak, safeguard their health, religion, and character, and grant them well-being in their bodies, faith, and endeavors. Bestow upon them sustenance through me and by my hand. O Allah, make all my children virtuous, pious, perceptive, and obedient to You, loving to Your friends, and hostile to Your enemies. Amen! O Allah, make them affectionate toward me, loving and supportive of me, and steadfast in helping me. Make them obedient to me, not rebellious or defiant, and keep them away from error and opposition. O Allah, grant me success in raising and nurturing them with goodness, and protect me and my children from the harm of the accursed Satan." (Imam Ali Ibn Al-Husayn, p. 105, Supplication 25).

This heartfelt supplication exemplifies the profound commitment of Islamic parenting to nurturing a child's holistic well-being—spiritual, physical, and emotional. It underscores the sacred responsibility of parents to intercede on behalf of their children through sincere prayer, to cultivate their character through forgiveness and guidance, and to establish a foundation of righteous upbringing that aligns with divine principles.

8. Fathers, the Best Role Models

This element, not explicitly addressed by Pleck (2010), is an addition

by the researcher, drawn from the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and the Bible. Being a role model encompasses all other concepts—engagement in activities, warmth, and control. Fathers who act as positive role models demonstrate their values through actions, such as showing kindness, fairness, and respect in their interactions. They embody warmth by expressing love, affection, and emotional support toward their children. Moreover, they respond to their children's needs by actively listening, offering guidance, and providing support rooted in their values and life experiences.

Imam Ali (AS) stated, "By Allah, I do not encourage you to do any act of obedience except that I have already performed it myself, and I do not forbid you from any wrongdoing except that I have avoided it before you." (Salih, 1995, sermon 175) This hadith underscores that fathers should lead by example, embodying integrity, humility, and piety, inspiring their children to follow the path of goodness through their actions, rather than just words.

Garbarino (2000), a renowned psychologist and child development expert, emphasizes the spiritual dimension of a father's role as a role model. He argues that the focus should not merely be on a father's physical presence or absence but on how well he fulfills his spiritual purpose, crafting a life story that serves as an inspiring and meaningful example for his child.

9. Demonstrating Justice and Fairness: A Father's Role in Setting an Example

One of the most critical aspects of fatherhood in setting a good role model for his children is manifested in how he demonstrates justice and equality. In Islamic teachings, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) repeatedly emphasized the importance of fairness in treating one's children. Justice between children fosters mutual respect and

strengthens familial bonds while instilling the value of equity in the next generation.

It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was once sitting with his companions when he saw a man with two children. The man kissed one child but not the other. Observing this, the Prophet (PBUH) gently questioned the man about his behavior and asked, “Why did you not treat them equally by showing the same affection to both?” This gentle reminder underscores the importance of fairness in all interactions with children.

The Prophet (PBUH) also stated: “Indeed, Allah Almighty loves that you act justly among your children, even in showing affection through kisses.” The significance of fairness extends beyond affection to material gifts. It is reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Be just among your children in giving gifts. If I were to prefer anyone, I would have preferred daughters.” In another instance, a man told the Prophet (PBUH) that he had given a gift to one of his children but not to the others. The Prophet (PBUH) responded, “Fear Allah and act justly among your children.”

These teachings highlight that fairness and equality in all dealings with children are essential for maintaining harmony and earning divine favor. By modeling justice in their actions, fathers not only fulfill their responsibilities but also instill critical values of fairness and respect in their children, setting a strong moral example for them to emulate.

10. Moral and Spiritual Guidance

Fathers are tasked with imparting moral and spiritual teachings to their children. The Quran and hadith emphasize the importance of guiding children on the path of righteousness, instilling values of faith,

honesty, compassion, and justice. Fathers are encouraged to lead by example and to establish a strong moral foundation within the family unit.

Surah Al-Tahrim highlights the responsibility of believers to protect themselves and their families from the consequences of wrongdoing (from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones). Fathers, as the heads of their households, play a crucial role in instilling the fear of Allah, guiding their families towards righteousness, and protecting them from spiritual harm. (Al-Tahrim: 6).

According to a narration from Imam Sadiq (AS), when this verse was revealed, a man from among the Muslims sat down and wept, saying, "I am incapable of protecting myself; now I am also made responsible for my family!"

The Prophet of God (PBUH) said: "It is sufficient for you to command them to do what you are commanded to do and to forbid them from what you are forbidden." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2009b).

Elsewhere in the Quran, in surah Ibrahim (Ibrahim :40), the concern of a father in maintaining prayers which is considered as the pillar of faith is mentioned. Here, Prophet Ibrahim voices his concern over his children's faithfulness and their steadfastness in establishing prayers as it "restrains from indecent and wrongful conduct" (Ankabut: 45).

The Quran often cites the story of Prophet Ibrahim as a model of exemplary fatherhood. Ibrahim's unwavering faith, patience, and devotion to God serve as an inspiration for fathers to embody these qualities and transmit them to their children.

Surah Baqarah (Baqarah: 124) beautifully illustrates Ibrahim's fatherly role, depicting his deep concern for the spiritual well-being of his children and future generations. In this verse, after fulfilling a series of divine commands, Ibrahim asks God if His covenant extends

to his descendants. God responds, “My pledge does not extend to the unjust,” underscoring that the spiritual responsibility of fatherhood goes beyond immediate needs, focusing on guiding future generations toward righteousness. This exchange highlights Ibrahim’s awareness of the broader responsibility he carries not only for his own spiritual growth but also for the well-being of his descendants and society as a whole. It illustrates the importance of a father’s role in shaping the spiritual development of future generations.

Surah Al-Isra (Al-Isra: 80) features a profound supplication by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), where he asks Allah for steadfastness in his journey: "And say: My Lord! Cause me to come in with a firm incoming and to go out with a firm outgoing. And give me from Thy presence a sustaining Power." This verse emphasizes the importance of spiritual resilience. It highlights that a father's spiritual guidance is most effective when he exemplifies the values he teaches, setting a practical model for his children. Therefore, before guiding others, a father must first focus on his own spiritual development, ensuring that his actions align with the principles he imparts to his children.

Another instance of father’s spiritual guidance is seen in Surah Luqman (Luqman:12-19). Although Luqman is not a prophet, his wisdom and teachings have been included in the Quran as a source of inspiration and guidance.

In these verses, Luqman advises his son with profound wisdom and teaches him important principles:

1. *Tawhid* (Monotheism): Luqman instructs his son to worship and associate nothing with Allah.
2. Avoiding *Shirk* (Polytheism): Luqman cautions his son against associating partners with Allah.
3. Accountability for Actions: Luqman teaches his son that even

the weight of a mustard seed's worth of good or evil will be brought forth on the Day of Judgment. He emphasizes that Allah is aware of all actions and is subtle and acquainted with everything.

4. Establishing Prayer and Promoting Goodness: Luqman advises his son to establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and remain patient in the face of adversity. He highlights the importance of adhering to righteousness and maintaining perseverance

These verses, among others in the Quran, emphasize the importance of fathers providing moral and spiritual guidance to their children. They highlight the role of fathers in protecting their families from spiritual harm, and adherence to the teachings of Allah, seeking strength and guidance from Allah, and prioritizing enduring good deeds.

The Quran highlights several prophets as exemplary father figures, offering valuable lessons in guidance and moral responsibility. Prophet Adam, as the father of humanity, teaches repentance and divine guidance (Al-Baqarah: 30-39). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) exemplifies obedience and sacrifice, particularly in his willingness to follow God's command concerning his son (Al-Safat:102-109). Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) is revered for his righteous lineage (Maryam: 49-50), while Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) demonstrates wisdom and fairness in managing family challenges (Yusuf: 5-6). Prophet Shu'ayb is known for raising two wise and chaste daughters and choosing Prophet Musa (Moses) as his son-in-law (Al-A'raf: 85, Al-Qasas: 25-28). Prophet Nuh (Noah) remains dedicated to guiding his son despite rejection (Surah Hud: 45-47), and Prophet Lut (Lot) is concerned for his daughters' and community's well-being (Al-Hijr: 71). Lastly, Prophet Muhammad's role in guiding his family spiritually reflects his fatherly responsibility (Al-

Shu'ara: 214). These prophets provide diverse examples of fatherhood, emphasizing spiritual guidance, compassion, and moral leadership.

Each of these prophets provides unique insights into the multifaceted aspects of fatherhood, encompassing traits like obedience to God, sacrifice, resilience, guidance, justice, and care, offering timeless lessons for generations.

11. Naming the Child

An instance of the father's role is guiding the child in spiritual growth is naming him/her as it reflects a father's responsibility to provide a positive foundation for the child's identity. For instance, when Allah gave Prophet Zakariya (AS) the glad tidings of a son, He revealed to him: "O Zakariya, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be Yahya. We have not assigned to any before [him] this name." (Maryam: 7). This highlights the divine emphasis on the uniqueness and virtue of a name.

In a narration, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (AS) said: "The first act of kindness a man bestows upon his child is to give them a good name. So, let each of you choose a beautiful and good name for your child." (Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1994, Vol. 21, p. 389) This statement underscores that choosing a meaningful and virtuous name is an initial act of benevolence, shaping the child's sense of self and aligning their identity with values of dignity and righteousness.

12. Reproached Fatherhood in the Quran

In the Quran, narratives unfold to reveal diverse familial relationships, including instances that shed light on challenging or negative interactions between fathers and their children. While the Quran extols the virtues of kind, supportive, and righteous parents, it also presents

accounts of fathers whose actions or attitudes serve as cautionary examples.

Surah Luqman (Luqman:13-19) offers a profound dialogue between Luqman and his son, where Luqman imparts invaluable wisdom. Within this exchange (verse 15), there's counsel for children when faced with parental encouragement toward actions contrary to faith or righteousness. It illustrates the importance of staying steadfast in faith while maintaining respect for parents, even if they deviate from the path of righteousness.

The Quran also touches upon the disappointment some fathers expressed upon the birth of daughters. Surah An-Nahl (An-Nahl: 58-59) conveys the negative reaction some fathers exhibited upon the arrival of a female child, underscoring the need to challenge such cultural biases.

Moreover, Surah Al-Isra (Al-Isra: 31) addresses the reprehensible act of killing children out of fear of poverty, condemning it as a grave sin. The verse underscores the sanctity of life and rebukes the abhorrent practice of infanticide, emphasizing that God provides for both parents and children.

In the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his father Azar (Maryam: 41-48), there's a depiction of a father (or uncle according to some interpreters) who adamantly rejects the guidance of his righteous son. Azar's disbelief and resistance to accepting the truth conveyed by Prophet Ibrahim serve as an example of familial opposition to faith and righteousness.

According to the Quran, the most important duty of a father is spiritual guidance. This duty is neglected by many fathers especially in today's life. According to a narration in Mustadrak al-Wasāʾil (Nūrī, n.d., Vol. 15, p. 164, Hadith 17871), it has been narrated that the Prophet

Muhammad, looked at some children and said, 'Woe to the children of the end of times from the hands of their fathers!' It was asked, 'O Prophet of God! From their polytheist fathers?' He replied, 'No, from their believing fathers who do not teach them what is obligatory, and when their children seek knowledge themselves, they hold them back, content with a little of the world for them. I detest them, and they detest me.

When juxtaposing this account with verse 46 from Surah Kahf, which underscores that worldly possessions and offspring embellish this temporal life while lasting virtuous acts hold greater favor and promise with the divine, it becomes evident that another hazard for fathers, as highlighted in the Quran, lies in deviating away from the path of monotheism while nurturing their children. Fathers mustn't prioritize worldly pleasures as life's paramount objective; instead, in steering their families, they ought to continually reiterate this fundamental truth.

The examples highlighted in the Quran reflect both the reverence owed to parents in general and, in certain instances, spotlight the dynamics involving fathers specifically. While the Quran stresses the overarching importance of respecting and showing kindness to both parents, particular narratives delve into the nuances of father-child relationships. These narratives offer insight into the challenges, conflicts, and differing beliefs that can emerge within father-child relationships while emphasizing the overarching principles of reverence and righteousness.

13. The Biblical Perspective on Fatherhood

In mentions the absence of fathers in today’s societies and adds:

A father possessed of a clear and serene masculine identity who

> demonstrates affection and concern for his wife is just as necessary as a caring mother. (Francis, 2016, p. 133)

Two pivotal focal points of our investigation revolve around the significance of paternal roles in the life of children and the impact of religiosity on parenting. The initial emphasis underscores that the absence of fathers is a fundamental factor contributing to family dysfunctionality. This absence significantly impacts various aspects such as suicide rates, juvenile delinquency, behavioral issues, homelessness among children, and increased school dropouts. These outcomes are notably influenced by the lack of paternal presence within the family unit (Freeks, 2017).

The second point is that Parental dedication to religion, particularly during difficult times, often correlates with several positive family outcomes. This includes reduced stress among parents, increased satisfaction in their parenting roles, and improved harmony in marriages (Mahoney et al, 2001). Research suggests that these positive effects are due to parents attributing sacred value to their roles, endowing everyday parenting tasks with spiritual significance. This perspective helps them perceive challenges as more manageable, worthwhile, and rewarding, while also enhancing their ability to adapt (El-Khani & Calam, 2018). In fact, Prophet Ibrahim could go through the test of his son's sacrifice through his monotheistic beliefs (Genesis 22:1-19). Moreover, a man who does not strives to provide for his family is considered as an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8) hence, imagine the spiritual status of a man who comes home with his hands filled with grocery bags to make his family happy.

In the Bible, fathers hold a significant role that extends beyond mere parentage. They are portrayed as central figures responsible for modeling Godly character, Disciplining and spiritually guiding with love, protecting the family and providing for its material and spiritual

needs, praying for and blessing children and building family unity. The biblical concept of fatherhood emphasizes instilling moral values and faith in their offspring.

Numerous biblical narratives, such as the story of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and his sons, or the parable of the prodigal son, illustrate the multifaceted roles of fathers in shaping the lives and destinies of their children. These narratives often highlight the importance of paternal guidance, love, and the transmission of faith and values from one generation to the next. We will deal with each of these fatherly roles, responsibilities and personalities in the following section.

14. Cultivation of a Healthy Bond with One's Wife

Foremost among a father's responsibilities lies the cultivation of a healthy bond with his spouse. Regardless of a father's dedication to his children or the extent of his supportive role, the bedrock of family life hinges upon the strength of the marital relationship. As articulated in Ephesians 5:25 of the Bible, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her,' this verse underscores the paramount importance of a husband's affection and self-sacrifice for his wife. It underscores the pivotal role of conjugal love and commitment in nurturing a thriving and harmonious family milieu.

In Christian teachings, a strong spousal relationship is built on mutual respect, love, and understanding. According to 1 Peter 3:7, husbands are called to honor their wives and treat them with understanding, while wives are encouraged to respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 further emphasizes that love should be patient, kind, and free from selfishness or arrogance, reflecting the enduring commitment between spouses. Colossians 3:18-19 defines

love within marriage as selfless, urging wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives with a sacrificial, Christ-like love. Together, these biblical principles show that a godly marriage, based on mutual love and respect, serves as the foundation for a healthy and thriving future generation.

Research shows the connection between parents' marital quality and their adult children's attitudes toward various family issues, such as premarital sex, cohabitation, singlehood, and divorce. It is suggested that better marital quality in parents is linked to lower support from children for these behaviors in adulthood (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006). Hence, the stronger the marital bond is cultivated between a couple, the more the chances of the adult children of these couples to establish strong families and build a stronger and healthier society.

15. A Father Provides and Protects:

The Bible recognizes the responsibility of fathers to provide for the physical and emotional needs of their families. This includes providing for basic necessities, ensuring a safe and loving environment, and protecting their loved ones. Apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:8, ‘But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.’ This verse explicitly mentions the necessity of financially providing for one’s family.

16. Emotional Availability

Fatherly emotional support is depicted in Colossians 3:21: 'Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged' (NIV).

This verse echoes the sentiment of nurturing children in a supportive and encouraging manner. It advises fathers against actions

or behaviors that may cause bitterness or resentment in their children, which could lead to discouragement or demoralization. Instead, it emphasizes the role of fathers in fostering an environment of kindness, understanding, and emotional support for their children's well-being and growth.

As stated in the beginning of this article, emotional availability is one of the requirements of involved fatherhood according to renown psychologists Lamb and Pleck, though it is relatively new compared with mother's emotional involvement (Parker & Wang, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the practices expected from both mothers and fathers are subject to change and vary from culture to culture (Miller, 2011, p. 1). In societies like those in Scandinavia, men are expected to take parental leave following the birth of a child and share equally in the responsibility of caring for the child, much like mothers. Fatherhood, in this context, sits between a past where men were primarily seen as the family's breadwinners and a present where they are expected to be equal partners in parenting, on par with mothers.

Religious teachings, in contrast, emphasize that emotional provision has long been a fundamental aspect of fatherhood, a role that has been overlooked over the centuries. Today, partly due to feminist movements and the growing emphasis on gender equality, along with shifting expectations for both mothers and fathers, there is a renewed reference to sacred texts by believers of faiths, searching for the right answer. By drawing on these teachings, we can avoid falling into extremes, reviving valuable wisdom that can contribute to the health and well-being of families.

17. Playing with the Child

The Bible does not explicitly mention fathers engaging in play with their children, but it emphasizes principles that encourage joyful,

nurturing, and compassionate relationships between fathers and their offspring. Verses like *Psalm 103:13* highlight a father's tender care, while *Proverbs 17:22* underscores the value of a joyful heart, which can naturally include playful interactions. In *Ephesians 6:4*, fathers are instructed to raise their children with love and balanced discipline, fostering an environment where joy and connection can thrive. Additionally, *Zechariah 8:5* depicts children playing in the streets, symbolizing a harmonious and peaceful community where families are lively and thriving. While direct references to father-child play are absent, these principles affirm the importance of fathers cultivating relationships filled with joy, warmth, and meaningful connection.

18. Praying for and Blessing Children

Fathers are encouraged to pray for their children and bless them with words of affirmation, encouragement, and guidance. In the Bible, we see instances where fathers bless their children and pray for God's favor and protection upon them. For example, Jacob blesses his sons in Genesis 49:28 as the Bible says, 'All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him'.

19. Fathers Exemplify Godly Character and Serve as Role Models for Their Children

Fathers are called to exemplify godly character and serve as role models for their children. They are expected to display traits such as love, kindness, patience, humility, and integrity as they need to grasp the significance of their religious practices as it affects their children's inclination to pursue a connection with God (Freeks, 2018, p. 156). Proverbs 20:7 states, ‘The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him.’

In Genesis 22:1-19, Ibrahim's incredible test of faith is portrayed. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a test of obedience.

"Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." (Genesis 22: 2)

Despite the emotional turmoil, Ibrahim demonstrates unwavering faith and obedience to God. This narrative showcases Ibrahim's remarkable patience, submission to divine will, and unwavering faith.

Another instance of displaying faith and patience in a father figure is in the story of Job (Job: 1-42). Job, a righteous man is illustrated enduring tremendous suffering. Despite being a faithful servant of God, Job faces profound loss and affliction, including the loss of his wealth, children, and his own health. People offer unsound advice, questioning why he, an upright man, must endure such hardship. However, Job steadfastly holds onto his integrity, refusing to blame God for his misfortune. His response emphasizes the idea of suffering not as a punishment, but as part of God's larger plan, even though he does not understand the reason behind it. In the end, God restores Job's fortunes, demonstrating his unwavering patience, endurance, and trust in God's righteousness.

While these narratives do not explicitly prescribe a father's role as a model for his children, the interpretation presented here reflects the researcher's exegetical reading of the cited passages.

20. Fathers Discipline and Provide Spiritual Instruction with Love

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers are encouraged to nurture and instruct their children in the ways of righteousness. The Bible highlights the importance of fathers teaching their children about God's commandments, values, and moral principles and to discipline them with love with the aim of correction and growth rather than harshness or anger.

King David, known for his devotion to God, expressed his love and spiritual guidance to his son Solomon. In 1 Chronicles 28:9, David advises Solomon, saying:

> "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought."

David's guidance to Solomon emphasizes devotion to God, displaying spiritual instruction with love.

Proverbs 13:24[1] underscores the significance of disciplined guidance in parenting. The verse contrasts neglectful leniency with diligent correction in nurturing children. It suggests that refraining from necessary discipline can be detrimental to a child's development, indicating that avoiding correction out of misguided leniency or neglect could harm the child. Conversely, the verse emphasizes that caring parents, motivated by love, demonstrate their affection through conscientious correction and guidance. It stresses that proper discipline, when driven by love, plays a crucial role in shaping a child's behavior and character, reflecting the importance of balanced and caring guidance in parenting.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of fathers fostering unity

1. Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

and harmony within the family. They are called to provide for their family, prioritize healthy relationships, resolve conflicts, discipline with love, and promote love and unity among family members. Ephesians 6:2-4 instructs fathers not to provoke their children to anger but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Psalm 133:1 also states, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" This verse emphasizes the value and desirability of unity within the family.

21. Fatherhood of God[1]

The use of filial language to express God's relationship to his people is found in the Hebrew Bible, or what Christians call the Old Testament, and in the New Testament (for Old Testament texts, see Reinhartz, 1999 and Szymik, 2020). In speaking about Old Testament texts of this nature, Stephan Szymik explains that "[t]he biblical depiction of God as Father refers to the image of an Israelite family, which was close to the inspired authors, in which the father had a special place as their parent, provider and educator, but also their guardian and protector (Szymik, 2020, p. 488).

This characterization of the divine-human filial relationship carries through into the much of the Apocryphal literature (Szymik, 2020, p. 489), and into the Bible where Jesus' teachings about God the Father become foundational to New Testament theology of God as Father (Szymik, 2020, p. 486-498). It is important to note at the outset that terminology of God as Father, which appears 125 times in the Gospel of John (Reinhartz, 1999, p. 7), is to be understood metaphorically. Offering three categories of meaning for metaphor, Reinhartz posits that it is

1. This section is written by Dr. Linda Darwish.

the third—that metaphor is a narrative strategy for speaking about something unknown and profound in familiar ways—which points to the meaning of fatherhood in the Gospels. As do Christians the world over, Dickey-Young understands the metaphor of God the Father as "the God who in Christian tradition has been seen primarily as One who relates to the world in intimacy and love" (Dickey-Young, 1999, p. 199).

It is this foundational New Testament theology of divine Fatherhood (though not unique to the Christian scriptures) that stands behind Christian theological articulations of the nature of human fatherhood. While the fatherhood of God is deeply embedded within Christian trinitarian theology, it should not be forgotten that the Bible also contains numerous allusions to feminine language about God's care, including especially God's motherly care (see Neuhaus, "While We're At It," First Things, January 2008, p. 62; see also Dickey-Young).

The analogy of divine fatherhood has also been problematic for some within the church who experienced various forms of abuse by their own fathers. Studies have shown that experiences of abuse have detracted from religiosity (amongst a variety of religions) amongst those so abused (see, for example, Bierman, 2005).

22. Reproached Fatherhood in the Bible

In examining fatherhood in the Bible, there are instances where fathers' actions or inactions had significant consequences on their children. For instance, the story of Eli, a priest in Israel, demonstrates the impact of inadequate parental guidance. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, behaved wickedly, dishonoring their roles as priests and engaging in immoral conduct (1 Sam 2:12-36). Despite being aware of their wrongdoing, Eli failed to effectively discipline or correct them, neglecting his role as a father and spiritual mentor. Consequently,

God's judgment fell upon Eli and his descendants due to his inability to address his sons' misconduct:

> 'Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?' (1 Sam 2:29)

The concept of conditional divine favor is evident in both the Bible and the Qur'an. In 1 Samuel 2:30-33, God revokes His promise to Eli's family due to their corruption, declaring that only those who honor Him will receive honor, while the disobedient will face downfall. Similarly, in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:124), when Prophet Ibrahim asks if his descendants will be granted leadership, God replies: "لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ" (*"My covenant does not extend to the wrongdoers."*). Both passages underscore that divine favor and leadership are reserved for those who uphold righteousness and integrity, highlighting the responsibility and accountability inherent in spiritual leadership.

A father's role is pivotal in shaping his family's spiritual and moral legacy. By embodying integrity and faith, he sets a lasting example for his children. Eli's neglect led to his family's downfall, while Prophet Ibrahim's dedication secured blessings for his descendants.

Another example is King David, revered as a great king, yet his failure as a father is evident in the rebellion of his son Absalom (2 Sam 15:1-12). Absalom sought to overthrow David's kingdom, highlighting the consequences of paternal negligence or flawed guidance.

These biblical accounts underline the profound influence fathers wield over their children and the repercussions of their actions or inactions in shaping their offspring's lives.

23. Practical Suggestions: Mentorship and Community Support in Strengthening Fatherhood

"Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and transgression" (Al-Ma'idah: 2).

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

In today's increasingly individualistic societies, many men navigate life in isolation, shaped by the belief that masculinity requires unwavering strength and emotional restraint. Phrases such as "men don't cry" reinforce the expectation that men must suppress their emotions rather than seek support, contributing to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and interpersonal struggles. Within the mesosystem—encompassing family, religious institutions, and community networks—mentorship and social support can help alleviate these challenges. Engagement with experienced fathers, religious mentors, or peer support groups provides practical guidance on fatherhood, marriage, and personal well-being, reducing the risk of crisis-driven parenting and relational breakdowns. The importance of such support becomes clear when considering the impact of paternal mental health on children: fathers experiencing depression or PTSD are more likely to have children who exhibit behavioral problems, including hyperactivity and emotional difficulties, with boys often showing more pronounced effects (Farero et al., 2020). This underscores the need for interventions that support fathers' mental health, not only for their own well-being but also to promote healthier child development.

Religious and community spaces serve as key components of the mesosystem, fostering mentorship and emotional guidance. Within mosques, churches, religious study groups, and family gatherings,

men have access to structured opportunities for meaningful conversations and shared experiences. These interactions bridge the gap between personal struggles and communal wisdom, allowing men to navigate fatherhood with greater awareness and resilience. Religious leaders, including priests, imams, and scholars, play a fundamental role in reshaping cultural narratives surrounding masculinity and fatherhood. Through sermons, study circles, and counseling, they encourage men to express their struggles, engage in their children's upbringing, and redefine masculinity beyond silent endurance. Rather than suffering in isolation, fathers are empowered to actively address personal and familial challenges through wisdom and emotional intelligence.

A practical form of mesosystemic support is the establishment of community-based financial assistance groups. In both Islam and Christianity, men are traditionally seen as primary providers, and financial burdens can become overwhelming stressors in a father's life. Structured initiatives—such as collective funding pools, where a group of men contribute regularly to support those facing financial hardships—offer tangible relief, ensuring that fathers can continue fulfilling their responsibilities without falling into debt or distress. These financial networks not only provide material aid but also reinforce the concept that fatherhood is not an isolated journey, and that strong communities actively support and uplift one another.

24. The Role of a Man's Wife and Family in Supporting Fatherhood

A father's ability to fulfill his role in the family is deeply influenced by the microsystem, which includes his closest relationships, particularly with his wife and extended family. The bioecological systems' theories of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) highlight

how direct interactions within the microsystem shape an individual's development, meaning that a wife's support, encouragement, and cooperation are crucial in shaping a father's engagement with his children.

Religious traditions assign men the responsibility of leadership within the household, yet their effectiveness in this role is greatly influenced by their wives' support and recognition. When a wife respects, encourages, and enables her husband's involvement in fatherhood, she helps create a stable and nurturing family environment that fosters the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual well-being of their children.

The Quran describes righteous wives as those who uphold their husbands' authority and contribute to maintaining harmony in the household. In Surah An-Nisa (An-Nisa: 34), it states: "So righteous women are devoutly obedient (قانتات)..."

The term "قانتـات" (devoutly obedient) signifies not just compliance but a willing acceptance of a husband's leadership in family matters, including child education. This verse highlights that when a wife respects and upholds her husband's role, she enables him to lead the family with wisdom and responsibility. The importance of a wife's support is also emphasized in narrations from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who stated:

"A man has a right over his wife: if he calls her, she should respond, and if he instructs her (in a manner consistent with Islamic principles), she should not disobey him, nor answer him with opposition, nor act against his wishes." (Nuri, n.d., vol. 14, p. 243).

However, in many cases, cultural influences have led some women to assume full control over child-rearing, leaving little room for fathers to engage in their children's education and upbringing.

Some women, shaped by their family backgrounds, may view parenting as primarily a maternal duty, unintentionally discouraging their husbands from taking an active role. This can weaken a father's presence in the home and limit his ability to be a spiritual and moral guide for his children. Yet, Fathers play a unique role in their children's lives that is not merely a replication of maternal influence. Research highlights that fathers often contribute distinct forms of engagement, such as promoting independence, risk-taking, and problem-solving skills, which complement the nurturing and protective tendencies more commonly associated with mothers (Paquette, 2004).

A wife's words, actions, and overall attitude can either encourage or discourage a father from actively engaging in his role. Supportive words and gestures that reinforce his confidence in parenting strengthen his commitment to his children, while criticism or discouragement can lead to emotional detachment. Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (peace be upon him), in a letter to Malik al-Ashtar, emphasized the power of encouragement, stating: "Mention them with goodness and constantly encourage them. Acknowledge the important tasks they have accomplished, for remembering their good deeds motivates them to strive further." (Salih, 1995, letter 53) This principle applies within the family as well—when a wife recognizes and appreciates her husband's role in fatherhood, her encouragement reinforces his dedication and deepens his engagement in raising their children.

Some wives may wish for a more involved husband but may find that their spouse has had fewer opportunities to develop parenting skills or confidence in child upbringing. In such cases, instead of taking full control, women can create an environment that encourages shared learning by introducing religious and educational resources. Guiding family discussions toward scripture, parenting principles, or

faith-based education can support fathers in gradually embracing their role while strengthening their spiritual and emotional connection with their children.

However, a father's role in parenting is not solely influenced by his wife. Other close family members, particularly his parents and siblings, may also shape his perception of fatherhood and influence his engagement with his children. In an interview with an Iranian man of Iraqi descent who migrated to Sweden 25 years ago, he shared how his mother and sisters reprimanded him when he changed his son's diaper or clothes, questioning why he was taking on a task traditionally assigned to women. They told him, "Why don't you let your wife do that? That's not a man's job." While I do not seek to judge whether changing a diaper is appropriate for a father, I acknowledge that family opinions on fatherhood acts can induce feelings of shame or guilt, reinforcing traditional gender norms even when a father desires to take a more active role in caregiving. Such influences, embedded within the microsystem, can either support or constrain a father's ability to engage in parenting.

Furthermore, it is essential for mothers and extended family members to allow fathers space to take an active role, even if they make mistakes along the way. Many fathers hesitate to engage in parenting due to fear of criticism or feelings of inadequacy, particularly when they lack experience. Encouraging them to take the lead in spiritual guidance, discipline, and family decision-making can help develop their confidence as fathers. A narration from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) highlights the importance of not burdening men beyond their ability, stating:

> "It is not permissible for a woman to burden her husband beyond his capacity." (Nuri, n.d., vol. 14, p. 242).

This teaching aligns with Quranic principles in Surah Al-Baqarah (Al-Baqarah: 286): "لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا", "Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity."

These teachings emphasize a balanced approach to familial roles, where fathers are encouraged to fulfill their responsibilities, but without unrealistic expectations that might lead to stress or disengagement.

Ultimately, a man's wife and family play a significant role in supporting or inhibiting his involvement in fatherhood. A mother who respects, encourages, and nurtures her husband's role as a father creates a home environment where both parents meaningfully contribute to their children's development. At the same time, extended family members must recognize their influence over fatherhood practices and avoid discouraging paternal involvement based on traditional gender expectations. By working together rather than in competition, fathers and mothers can foster a stable, emotionally supportive, and well-balanced family environment, ensuring a healthier and more engaged upbringing for children.

Conclusion and discussion

Examining the roles of fathers in the Quran, Hadith, and the Bible through the combined lens of Pleck's (2010) Involved Fatherhood framework and Bronfenbrenner & Morris's (2006) Bioecological Systems Theory reveals a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of fatherhood. While modern research on fatherhood often emphasizes the quantitative and qualitative aspects of time spent with children (Shorey, Hong-Gu & Morelus, 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Mirnia et al., 2016), religious teachings offer a more holistic perspective that encompasses spiritual, moral, and familial well-being alongside material and emotional care. These sacred texts promote a model of

fatherhood that goes beyond financial provision and discipline. They highlight the father's role as a moral guide, a source of emotional support, and a stabilizing figure within the family. Although some historical interpretations of fatherhood have embraced patriarchal structures and authoritarian principles, the Quran, Hadith, and the Bible emphasize a model of fatherhood rooted in responsibility, active participation, and compassionate leadership.

Using Bronfenbrenner and Morris's Bioecological Systems Theory to examine religious teachings allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how a father's role is shaped by interwoven social structures. Microsystem: This level encompasses a father's direct interactions with his children and spouse. It highlights his role in emotional availability, play, caregiving, and moral education. Exosystem: This level addresses external influences like workplace policies, legal frameworks, and societal expectations, which introduce another variable in the extent of a father's involvement. For example, parental leave policies in Sweden demonstrate governmental efforts to encourage paternal participation, though cultural norms ultimately determine the degree to which men utilize these opportunities. Macrosystem: This level includes cultural values, religious teachings, and ideological beliefs that form the foundation of a father's sense of duty, leadership, and identity. Religious doctrines emphasize the father's pivotal role in maintaining family stability and moral development, aligning with these broader systemic influences.

My interviews with Iranian immigrant men in Sweden revealed that growing up in a religious household didn't necessarily translate to an inherent awareness of religious duties. Instead, cultural influences often played a more dominant role in shaping their understanding of fatherhood and their sense of responsibility as fathers. These families often operated under a structure where the

father was frequently absent from the home, and the mother was perceived as the primary caregiver and educator. Consequently, these men grew up with the belief that child-rearing and education were inherently maternal responsibilities. This perception persisted until they received formal or informal education that clearly outlined their religious obligations.

The following table illustrates how Pleck's five elements of involved fatherhood align with religious perspectives, highlighting their complementary insights:

Religious Elements of Fatherhood	Pleck's Elements of Involved Fatherhood	Explanation of Alignment
Spouse Selection & Establishing a Positive Marital Relationship	Indirect Care / Process Responsibility	A stable marital relationship supports the child's well-being indirectly. Fathers who take initiative in family matters foster harmony and security within the home.
Emotional Availability	Warmth and Responsiveness	Emotional availability aligns with Pleck's concept of showing affection, compassion, and being attuned to the child's emotional needs.
Material Provision	Indirect Care	Providing financially for the family reflects indirect care, ensuring the child's material needs are met (e.g., food, clothing, medical care, shelter, and education).
Playing with the Child	Positive Engagement Activities	Engaging in play, caregiving, and leisure activities directly promotes

Religious Elements of Fatherhood	Pleck's Elements of Involved Fatherhood	Explanation of Alignment
		a child's development, reflecting positive engagement.
Praying for Righteous Children	Control / Indirect Care	Praying for a child's spiritual well-being reflects moral oversight (control) and indirect care, as it supports the child's growth without direct interaction.
Fathers as Role Models	Positive Engagement Activities / Warmth and Responsiveness	Being a role model involves direct engagement and displaying warmth and responsiveness through ethical behavior and loving care.
Providing Spiritual and Moral Guidance	Control / Process Responsibility	Guiding children morally and spiritually aligns with monitoring their behavior and proactively ensuring ethical instruction and spiritual growth.

In today's landscape, where families lacking a father figure face significant challenges, religious teachings reinforce the father's essential role within the family structure, ensuring that childcare responsibilities are not solely placed upon mothers. Rather than endorsing a "mother-centric" parenting model, these teachings emphasize that fathers bear primary responsibility for moral guidance, financial provision, and active involvement in their children's upbringing. This redefinition of paternal responsibility not only alleviates the heavy burden on mothers but also ensures the stability and structure necessary for a child's holistic development.

Furthermore, fatherhood isn't just limited to raising children; it also shapes a man's individual worth, identity, and sense of fulfillment. The bioecological model illustrates how a father's macrosystem beliefs, such as his religious and cultural values, inform his understanding of what it means to be a father. Embracing the paternal role not only benefits his children but also strengthens his character, discipline, and emotional well-being. In an era where traditional masculinity faces increasing scrutiny, religious teachings on fatherhood offer a stabilizing framework, guiding men toward a balanced, responsible, and active approach to parenting. Rather than portraying fatherhood as a burden, these teachings emphasize its transformative potential, imbuing men with a renewed sense of purpose, belonging, and emotional connection. This profound impact on a father's self-concept can serve as a source of support and guidance for those navigating the evolving expectations of masculinity in modern society (Chereji et al., 2013).

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