

## **The Antecedent of Father Involvement: A Literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

Father involvement is an essential aspect of the parenting process. Several studies have proven the positive influence of father involvement on children's development. Unfortunately, both research on and implementation of parenting is still dominated by mothers, creating a need for studies on father involvement in child-rearing. This literature review was compiled using three databases: Scopus, Sage, and Science Direct. The main objective of this literature review is 1) to examine predictor variables of father involvement and 2) to assess the population of studies on father involvement. Forty-nine articles were analyzed in this review. The findings of this study show that research on paternal involvement in parenting is dominated by studies examining populations from a Western cultural context. In addition, most research on father involvement is rooted in the concept proposed by Lamb et al. (1985), in which paternal involvement is viewed through three dimensions: direct interaction, accessibility, and ultimate responsibility. Father-related, or individual, factors dominate the discourse of previous research as predictor variables of paternal involvement in parenting. A broader approach is required to determine predictor variables related to father involvement due to the fact that there are many differences in the concept of family identity in non-Western cultures, especially in more communal societies. Research limitations are further explained in the article.

**Keywords:** Father involvement; paternal involvement; the antecedent of father involvement, parenting, cross-cultural.

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### **Introduction**

Research in recent years has shown that father involvement positively impacts children's development. Several studies have shown that paternal involvement affects various aspects of a child's development, including the temperament of preschool children (McBride et al., 2002), children's cognitive abilities later in life (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004), unsafe attachment styles when

fathers are not adaptive to their children (Brown et al., 2007), and lower levels of problematic behaviors in children (Flouri, 2016, Yoon et al., 2017). Trautman-Villalba et al. (2006) add that if the father is not involved in parenting, children can experience psychopathological symptoms, including depression, antisocial traits, and increased behavior disorders. Ramchandani et al. (2013) state that fathers contribute uniquely to early childhood behavioral development, including the development of problem behaviors, beyond the effects of maternal influence.

Rapid economic change and modernization represent a challenge for traditional families, especially in urban areas (McHale et al., 2014). In traditional families, mothers are viewed as the primary caregivers of their children, only then followed by the father (Juhari et al., 2013; Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014). This traditional familial system is adapted to meet the needs of daily life and raise children (Chen, 2005). Economic challenges have shifted values and attitudes related to gender roles, as evident in the increasing number of women joining the workforce (Juhari et al., 2013; McHale et al., 2014). It is essential to continue studying this change, which requires fathers to be more willing and involved in parenting (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004).

Research findings indicate the positive impacts of father involvement. However, research into why fathers wish to be involved in parenting needs to be expanded (Baker, 2014). Mothers are still considered to be the primary caregivers of children, meaning that, compared to paternal involvement, research on maternal involvement in parenting continues to dominate the field (Bosco et al., 2003, Phares et al., 2009, Juhari et al., 2014). In addition, research on father involvement is still predominantly conducted in the context of middle-class white people (Cabrera & Coll, 2004). However, the dynamics of paternal involvement in the context of vulnerable fathers, including fathers who are poor, divorced, or who live separately or do not have access to their children, should be a particular focus (Perry & Langley, 2014). Patriarchal cultural contexts in which fathers do not have close relationships with their children should also be more closely examined. Based on this context, the main objectives of this study are 1) to attempt to

review the antecedents of fathers wanting to be involved in parenting and 2) to examine the context of the research populations of previous studies. This study can be beneficial in conducting further research. Through this research, it is hoped that the development of knowledge related to father involvement can be mapped so that subsequent research can expand the context and scope related to fathers' involvement in child care.

### *Defining Father Involvement*

The definition of the role of fathers in parenting has shifted over time. During the Puritan Era, the father's role was mainly directed toward moral teachings and the cultivation of religious values. In the 1920s, during the American industrial revolution, the father's role shifted to become more unidimensional: the family's breadwinner. During World War II and the end of the great depression in the 1940s, the role of fathers changed again to be that of a sex-role model, particularly for boys. Considering the many situational changes, the father's role is required in the current era and beginning to shift toward being more actively involved in parenting (Lamb, 2000).

Research on father involvement was initiated by Lamb et al. (1985), who formulated three dimensions of father involvement in parenting: 1) interaction, which refers to direct interactions between the father and their child in the form of either parenting or joint activities, 2) availability or the father's availability to be present and interact directly with their child, and 3) responsibility, which refers not to the amount of time a father spends with their child, but rather to the father's role in ensuring that the child is taken care of and that their needs are met by providing specific resources. The measurement approach tends to have one focus; on the amount of time a father spends interacting with his children and often ignores how the parenting process takes place. As it has developed, research on father involvement has become more multidimensional. In addition, the focus of research on paternal involvement can be viewed from two perspectives: the perspective of the child or the perspective of the father himself.

Finley & Schwartz (2004) developed a father involvement and parenting scale from the child's perspective. Using a phenomenological approach, Finley & Schwartz (2004) developed two instruments: the Nurturance Fathering Scale, which examines the quality of a father's parenting from the child's perspective; and the Father Involvement Scale, which examines paternal involvement in 20 aspects of adolescent life from the child's perspective. Dick (2004) also developed a fatherhood scale consisting of 9 sub-scales: positive engagement, positive paternal emotional responsiveness, negative paternal engagement, the moral father role, the gender role model, the good provider role, the androgynous role, responsible paternal engagement, and the accessible father. The scale developed by Dick (2004) is intended to measure the relationship of adult males with their fathers while growing up. Father involvement from the child's perspective is an important approach to examining the long-term effects of father involvement in parenting.

Studies also have developed scales of paternal involvement in parenting from the father's perspective. Ly & Goldberg (2014) developed a paternal involvement approach to parenting children with special needs. The scale developed by Ly & Goldberg (2014) is designed to assess fathers' perspectives on the support they receive in parenting children with special needs and their challenges. This scale is important as it provides a different perspective on paternal parenting in the context of children with special needs. Halme et al. (2010) examine the willingness and involvement of fathers in preschool education when their children are between the ages of three and six years old. Halme et al. (2010) focus on the number of times fathers are available to interact and conduct activities with their children and the extent to which the father enjoys these interactions. Hawkins et al. (2002) measured father involvement on a global scale using nine dimensions. Hawkins et al. (2002) developed the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) based on the concept of paternal involvement in parenting first proposed by Lamb et al. (1985) of direct interaction, accessibility, and ultimate responsibility. The IFI developed by Hawkins et al. (2002) consists of nine measurement dimensions: discipline and teaching responsibility, school

encouragement, mother support, providing time and talking together, praise and affection, developing talents and future concerns, reading and homework support, and attentiveness.

### *Determinant Factors of Father Involvement*

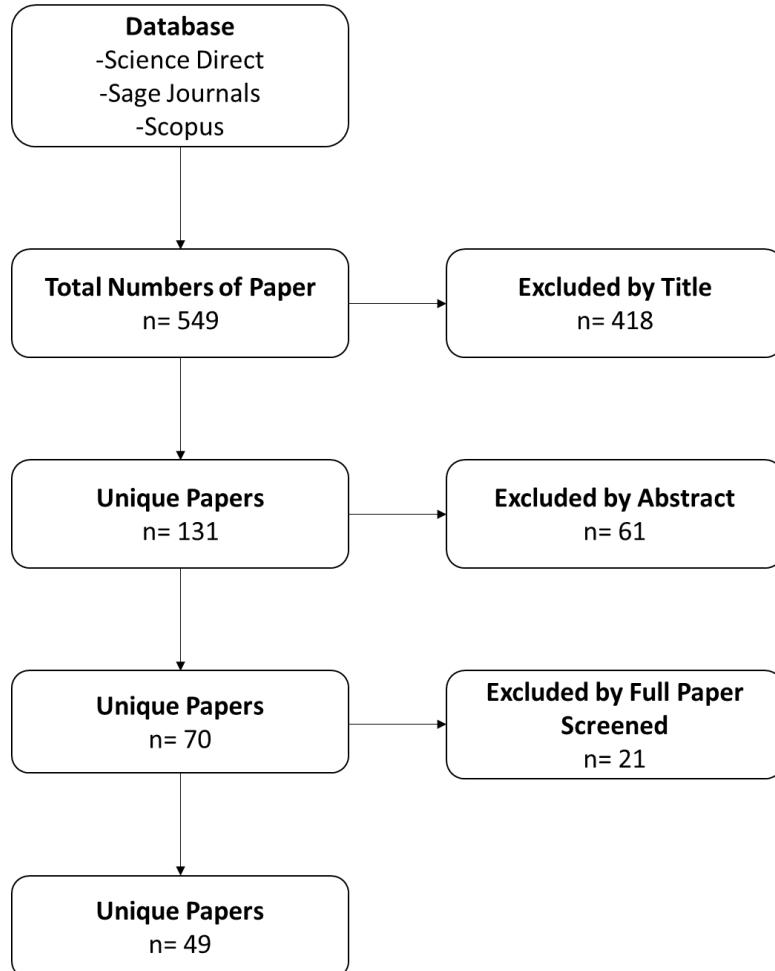
Several previous studies have attempted to explain the determinant factors of father involvement. Taking an ecological approach, Belksy (1984) revealed that parenting is multidimensional or determined by more than one factor. According to Belsky (1984), parenting is determined by the characteristics of the parents (e.g., personalities and depression), the characteristics of the child (e.g., negative emotions), and the characteristics of the family's social environment (e.g., marital relationships). Taraban & Shaw (2018) updated Belsky's (1984) theory, for example, by adding the Social Economic Status factor, whereas this factor is not acknowledged in the model developed by Belsky (1984). Feinberg (2002) expanded on Belsky's (1984) concept of ecological parenting by adding co-parenting as a mediating and moderating factor. Doherty et al. (1998) specifically revealed that research on parenting is often approached from a maternal perspective, and it is important to examine determinant factors specific to fathers. Factors that influence fathers' willingness to be involved in parenting, according to Doherty et al. (1998), are Contextual Factors (e.g., employment & economic factors), Child Factors (e.g., temperament, gender, behavioral development), Father Factors (e.g., role identification & knowledge), Coparental Relationship (e.g., marital status & mutual support), and Mother Factors (e.g., attitude toward father & expectations of father).

### **Method**

Publications were collected in October 2020 from three databases: Science Direct, Sage Journals, and Scopus. The keywords used to search article titles were "Father Involvement" OR "Paternal Involvement ."The general search criteria included research articles based on empirical data in English and with a publication date between 2005 and 2020. The search did not include books or

book chapters, proceedings, or articles consisting of an abstract only. Inclusion criteria for father involvement were predictors or determinant factors of father involvement. The search results' population was not limited to widen the search results' scope.

The initial database search produced 444 articles from Scopus, 51 from SAGE, and 44 from Science Direct. After screening titles and abstracts based on the inclusion criteria; determinant factors of father involvement, 70 articles remained. A more in-depth examination of the 70 articles was conducted to determine whether they met the predetermined criteria, resulting in 49 articles that were suitable for analysis. In more detail, the examination uncovered 83 duplicate articles, 71 descriptive articles that did not examine inter-variable relationships, 200 articles with the variable of father involvement as a predictor, 32 articles related to interventions, 15 literature reviews, 11 articles related to measuring the variable of father involvement, three medical articles, four meta-analyses, three articles without abstracts, 15 inaccessible articles, 1 article not in English, 11 articles that did not include father involvement as one of the variables measured, two proceedings, and 39 qualitative research articles.



**Fig. 1.** Flow diagram of the literature search and study exclusion process

## Results

### *Study Population*

In this study, the majority of research populations consisted of participants from the United States, with a total of 35 studies from this region, followed by Asia with a total of 9 studies, three studies from Europe, 1 Canadian study, and 1 African study. The majority of research samples

were fathers, with a total of 32 studies, followed by pairs of fathers and mothers in 11, only mothers in 4, fathers and children in 1, and only children in 1. Several studies were conducted in the context of fragile families (e.g., low income, low education, non-resident, unmarried, or racial/ethnic minority fathers), with this literature review revealing that 13 studies collected data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). Other studies focused on specific contexts, for example, families exposed to political violence (Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel, 2015), teenage parents (Varga et al., 2014), Muslim families (Juhari et al., 2013), fathers who work for large companies (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013), fathers who have criminal records (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017), and fathers who have non-standard working hours (Pilarz et al.; Weinsheker, 2015). Regarding the age of the children, there are studies on fathers of teenagers, children, and infants.

#### *Determinants of Father Involvement*

Determinants of father involvement are categorized into five groups of factors: father factors, mother factors, contextual factors, co-parental relationship factors, and children factors. This categorization was applied based on the factors developed by Doherty et al. (1998).

#### *Father Factors*

The individual factors of a father influence father involvement (Doherty et al., 1988). Sense of competence and self-efficacy in their involvement in parenting are predictors of whether a father will be involved in parenting or not (Cole et al., 2020; Trahan, 2017; Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel, 2015; Kwok & Li, 2014; Kwok et al., 2012; Freeman et al., 2008; Juhari et al., 2013). Self-efficacy causes fathers to feel more in control of their parenting behaviors (Trahan, 2017) and more adaptive when dealing with parenting problems (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Wittkowski et al., 2017; Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel, 2015). Thus, fathers with higher parenting self-efficacy tend to be more involved in the parenting process. However, a study by Cooper et al. (2019) revealed that a father's sense of competence could not moderate whether they will be involved in parenting or not. A positive attitude toward the importance of parenting is also a predictor of paternal involvement

(Pilkauskas & Schneider, 2020; Cooper et al., 2019; Adamsons & Pasley, 2016; McGill, 2014; Perry & Langley, 2013; Gaertner et al., 2007). Several studies have also shown that a father's gender identity plays a role in paternal involvement (Shafer et al., Planalp & Braungart-Rieker, 2016; Keizer, 2015; Kwok & Li, 2014; Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Freeman et al., 2008). If a father is confident that their role in parenting positively impacts their child and family, they are more likely to try to be involved and interact with their children. In addition, Cruz et al. (2011) and Glass & Owen (2010) specifically showed that gender identities developed in particular ethnic cultures play a role in father involvement. On the other hand, Perry & Langley (2013) argue that the father's subjective norms do not influence paternal involvement.

Variables related to the father's mental health, including levels of depression and stress, also have a negative effect on father involvement (Cole et al., 2020; Shafer & Renick, 2020; Baker, 2014; Paulson et al., 2011; Coley & Hernandez, 2006). However, research conducted by Planalp & Braungart-Rieker (2016) found that depression does not affect father involvement. A father's psychological well-being can also be a predictor of paternal involvement in parenting (Coates & Phares, 2014). Several studies have also examined the positive effects of the intergenerational factor of paternal relationships with their fathers as a predictor of father involvement (Coper et al., 2019; Jessee & Adamsons, 2018; Kulik & Sadeh, 2014; Juhari et al., 2013; Ishii-Kuntz, 2013, Saraff & Srivastave, 2010; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Shannon et al., 2005) In contrast, Coates & Phares (2014) found that intergenerational factors had no effect on father involvement. In addition, religiosity (Shafer et al., 2019; Lynn et al., 2016; Coates & Phares, 2014) and personality (Lynn et al., 2016) may also be predictors of paternal involvement. Interestingly, the type of religiosity that positively impacts paternal parenting is not general religiosity but rather more specific religiosity, for example, religious coping. Fathers who adopt religious coping mechanisms are better at managing the pressures in their lives, including in the context of parenting. This causes fathers to better understand parenting and tend to be more positively involved in the parenting process (Lynn et al., 2016).

### *Mother Factors*

In addition to internal factors influencing father involvement, mother factors also play a role in predicting whether a father will be involved in parenting or not (De Luccie, 1996). Murshid (2016) revealed that a mother having more power in household decisions than her partner negatively impacts father involvement. In addition, a mother's working hours also have an effect on paternal involvement (Weinshenker, 2015; McBride et al., 2005). If the mother works, the father tends to be more involved in parenting their children. A mother's attitudes and mother gatekeeping also have a negative correlation with father involvement (Kulik & Sadeh, 2014; McBride et al., 2005). Meanwhile, Paulson et al. (2011) revealed that a mother's depression levels indirectly negatively influence the father's involvement through the parental relationship variable. A mother's education also positively affects paternal involvement (Saraff & Srivastava, 2010; Baker, 2014; McClain & Demaris, 2013). Fathers are not culturally constructed to be greatly involved in parenting (Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014). This means that fathers do not perceive a natural ability or need to be involved in parenting their children, and thus the role, perspectives, and expectations of the mother are crucial in determining paternal involvement in parenting.

### *Contextual Factors*

Several variables related to the father's context play a role in determining father involvement (Doherty et al., 1988). Regarding aspects of a father's employment, paternity leave positively affects father involvement (Pilkauskas & Schneider, 2020; Knoester et al., 2019; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). Work schedule and duration also influence father involvement (Pilarz et al., 2019.; Weinshenker, 2015.; Saraff & Srivastava, 2010). In contrast, other studies have found work hours and duration to have no effect on non-resident fathers (Pilarz et al., 2019) or fathers in general (McGill, 2014). A father's employment status also influences their level of involvement (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017; Liu et al., 2016). In addition, Castillo et al. (2012) found that stable employment did not affect father involvement but that workplace flexibility positively impacted father involvement in parenting.

Several other contextual factors also impact paternal parenting. Fathers with higher incomes tend to be more involved in parenting (Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2009). Higher incomes are associated with fathers having greater access to resources, increasing their ability to be involved in parenting. Previous studies have also revealed that when fathers' and mothers' incomes are at the same level, the father tends to be more involved in parenting (Liu et al., 2016; Nwake, 2015). Father's level of education also has a positive relationship with their involvement in parenting (Liu et al., 2016; Juhari et al., 2013; Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2009). This trend is related to the fact that the higher a father's education, the more likely they are to have enough emotional maturity to feel responsible for parenting. Fathers' age also has an impact on their involvement in parenting their children, with older fathers being less likely to be involved in parenting (Baker, 2014; Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2009). However, Saraff & Srivasta (2010) research found that fathers' education did not influence paternal involvement. Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel (2015) also added further insights into the specific context of whether fathers had been exposed to security threats as a moderator of father involvement. Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel (2015) conducted their research in the context of Israel, where the fathers live in a state of anxiety due to political conflict. Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel's (2015) findings show that exposure to security threats cannot be used as a moderator between parental self-efficacy and father involvement, with self-efficacy continuing to affect father involvement positively. Research conducted by Sano et al. (2011) on non-resident fathers revealed that living in the same state as their children positively affected paternal involvement.

#### *Coparental Relationship Factors*

The relationship between a father and mother is an important factor in father involvement. Several studies have found that parenting alliances, or co-parenting, where a father and mother work together as a compact parenting unit, have a positive influence on father involvement (Cole et al., 2020; Lie et al., 2016; Varga, 2014; Kwok & Li, 2014; Coates & Phare, 2014; McClain & Demaris, 2013; Waller, 2012; Sano et al., 2011). One reason for this may be the spillover effect,

where having a healthy marital relationship has an impact on the father's other relationships, including with their children (Kwok & Li, 2014). In contrast, Trahan (2017) found that co-parenting does not have an impact on father involvement. The quality and satisfaction of the relationship between mother and father is also a predictor of paternal involvement (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017; Lynn et al., 2016; Baker, 2014; Varga et al., 2014; Kwok & Li, 2014; Juhari et al., 2013; Kwok, 2012; Paulson, 2011). However, several research findings have suggested that satisfaction in the relationship between mother and father does not have an effect on father involvement (Trahan, 2017; Shannon et al., 2005). Trahan (2017) revealed that internal factors, for example, the father's self-efficacy and expectations, have a more significant influence than external elements, such as their relationship with their partner or co-parenting factors. McLeod & Tirmazi (2017) also found that more robust relationships between the mother and father resulted in lower levels of paternal engagement in activities with children but were positively related to fathers' responsibility. The research conducted by McLeod & Tirmazi (2017) is unique in that it was conducted in the context of black fathers who have a criminal record.

This study also found that partners' social support positively affects father involvement (Cole et al., 2020; Coates & Phares, 2014; Kwok & Li, 2014; Castillo & Sarver, 2012). Meanwhile, conflicts between partners harm paternal involvement (Liu et al., 2016; Planalp & Braungart-Rieker, 2016; Waller, 2012; Sano et al., 2011; Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Several variables related to the status, including the father's living arrangements (Pilkauskas & Schneider, 2020), having children with other partners (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017), marital status (Baker, 2014; McClain & Demaris, 2013), the father's relationship with their former spouse or partner (Castillo & Fenzi-Crossman, 2009), and household structure, for example, whether they live as a close family unit or with extended family (Cabrera et al., 2008), also influence father involvement.

### *Children Factors*

This study found that children's factors received relatively little attention in previous studies compared to other factors. Lindberg et al. (2016) examined father involvement based on the father's intention to have children. When fathers want to have a child, they are more likely to be involved in parenting than fathers who have children due to unplanned or unwanted pregnancies (Lindberg et al., 2016). Other studies have examined children's characteristics (Coley & Hernandez, 2006), the number of children, and children's sex, age, and temperament as predictors of father involvement (Juhari et al., 2013; Kulik & Sadeh, 2014; Planalp & Braungart-Rieker, 2016).

### **Discussion**

Studies on father involvement were initially dominated by research based on the context of middle-class white people (Cabrera & Garcia Coll, 2004). As the topic developed, studies on father involvement began to arise from various contexts, including African American fathers (Coper et al., 2019; Baker, 2014; Coates & Phares, 2014), Latin fathers (Varga et al., 2014, Cruz et al., 2011; Glass & Owen, 2010), American Indian fathers (Saasa & Limb, 2017) low-income fathers (Perry & Langley, 2013; Varga et al., 2014), divorced fathers who no longer live with their children (Pilkauskas & Scheneider, 2020; Castillo et al., 2012), and in the context of various Asian countries (Liu et al., 2016; Juhari et al., 2013; Pagorek-Eshel & Dekel, 2015; Murshid, 2016; Kwok & Li, 2014; Kulik & Sadeh, 2014; Kwok et al., 2012; Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Saraff & Srivastava, 2010). The complex dynamics of father involvement, especially in the context of vulnerable fathers, including those who are poor, divorced, and no longer living with their children and who have limited access to their children, cannot be oversimplified (Perry & Langley, 2014).

The research populations of the 49 articles examined in this literature review were mostly from the context of the USA, with 35 studies. Of the remaining articles, nine were conducted in the context of Asia, three in Europe, one in Canada, and one in the African context. This finding

indicates that studies searching for predictors of father involvement are still primarily conducted in the context of the United States and should be explored more widely in countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other cultural contexts. The majority of studies on father involvement are still rooted in the research conducted by Lamb et al. (1985). According to Lamb et al. (1985), a father who is involved in parenting is a father who interacts directly with their child, is accessible to their child, and is responsible for various aspects of their child's life. This depiction is different from the concept of fatherhood in many Asian cultures, where fathers are portrayed as figures who work hard and are emotionally distant from their children, and most African countries have matrilineal family systems (Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to continue conducting further research with a broader context to enrich our understanding of father involvement.

In this study, it is evident that variables related to father factors are the focus of most research attempting to understand the determinant factors of father involvement. Identity theory argues that one factor that influences father involvement is identified as a father (Adamson & Pasley, 2016). Symbolic interactionism identity theory states that people construct their identity based on interactions and environmental expectations (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The ecological approach views the issue more broadly, examining the direct and indirect effects of different system levels (Kwok & Li, 2014). Previous research has consistently shown that the individual characteristics of the father are strong predictors of paternal involvement. However, examining the interactions between factors outside of the father's characteristics can help illustrate the factors that encourage fathers to want to be involved in parenting their children.

In the context of patriarchal cultures, fathers position themselves as heads of the family with absolute rights and power in making decisions related to the family. Fathers may assist in the case of parenting, but the mother remains the primary caregiver (Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014). This creates family stability and harmony centered on the relationship between mother and

father. Parenting is often a foreign and extremely demanding concept for fathers, especially in the context of patriarchal cultures, and support, appreciation, and recognition from their partners can be an important determinant factor of father involvement (Kwok & Li, 2014). As a result, factors related to a father's relationship with their partner should be explored in more detail.

The wife or the mother's situation is another factor that should be taken into consideration but is often overlooked in studies on father involvement. The mother's employment status, work hours (Weinshenker, 2015; McBride et al., 2005), and mental health condition (Paulson et al., 2011) can also influence the father's involvement. Previous studies have revealed that gatekeeping mothers have a negative impact on father involvement (Kulik & Sadeh, 2014; McBride et al., 2005). In the context of communal families, it must be noted that the concept of family does not solely consist of a father, mother, and children but is also related to grandfathers and grandmothers. (McHale et al., 2014). In this larger family concept, parents-in-law and other family members also have the opportunity to gatekeep parenting.

Often when talking about paternal parenting, the child's condition is overlooked. If the child is unplanned or unexpected, the father is less likely to be involved (Lindberg et al., 2016). The child having a difficult temperament is a predictor of conflict between the father and mother, causing the father to be less involved in parenting (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Broader and more in-depth studies are required to examine how factors relating to the child influence father involvement. In addition, there are limited studies on father involvement in parenting children with special needs, indicating a need for further research (Dyer et al., 2009; Bogossian et al., 2017).

## **Conclusion**

This literature review provides an overview of the determinant factors of father involvement. Studies relating to father involvement are multidimensional, considering factors relating to the

father, mother, context, co-parental relationship, and children. This study hopes to provide a basis for other researchers to conduct research related to father involvement. Several limitations of this literature review include the selection of articles only focused on the past 15 years, meaning variables outside of this period cannot be depicted in this study. Another limitation of this literature review is that it only utilized mainstream databases and consists mostly of research from Western countries, meaning it cannot account for the determinants of father involvement in countries outside of the West. Furthermore, the limited use of keywords may have resulted in articles related to the determinants of father involvement that use different keywords being overlooked by this study. Irrespectively, further research is required on father involvement, particularly from a wider context and exploring a more diverse range of variables.

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