Knowledge, Attitude & Practice: An Exploratory Investigation of Parenting Challenges Facing Malay-Muslim Fathers in Singapore

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Centre for Fathering
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Executive Summary

Background

i. This qualitative study aims to identify the socio-cultural challenges preventing Singaporean Malay-Muslim (MM) fathers from carrying out their parenting duties effectively.

ii. The investigation primarily relies on in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted with fathers, mothers and adult children.

iii. The investigation team conducted interviews with respondents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. In total, the respondents comprise 50 fathers, 10 mothers and 10 adult children from the Malay-Muslim community.

Key Findings

i. Role of Islam
Malay-Muslim fathers see Islam as providing them with a framework on how to be effective parents. However, they articulate different levels of understanding on how this is to be adhered to.

ii. Networks and Relationships
Social networks and relationships provide support and reference points to guide Malay-Muslim fathers in carrying out their parental duties. The quality of information dissemination arising from human interactions is thus crucial in value-adding to Malay-Muslim fathers' parenting knowledge.

iii. Quality Time
Malay-Muslim fathers do see value in spending quality time with their children. However, many are unaware of what constitutes quality time with their loved ones. Subsequently, these fathers do not seek knowledge on strategies to spend time productively with their children.

Moving Forward

The findings from this research can now be used by relevant Malay/Muslim organisations, community service organisations as well as relevant government agencies to design intervention measures to overcome the identified challenges.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This report serves to present the findings of a completed Institute of Policy Studies research project that was conducted from November 2019 to April 2021. The study was commissioned by the Centre for Fathering, the Association of Muslim Professionals, PPIS (Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura, or the Singapore Muslim Women's Association) and the Lutheran Church Community Services. Funding for the project was received via the Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs)-Charities Capability Fund (VCF) administered by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). The 18-month study investigated the challenges to effective parenting faced by Singaporean Malay-Muslim fathers, specifically factors relating to the socio-cultural domains of **knowledge**, **attitude** and **practice**. These three domains are explained as follows:

i.   The domain of **knowledge** relates to the investigation of Malay-Muslim fathers' sources of knowledge relating to childcare.
ii.   The domain of **attitude** relates to the investigation of Malay-Muslim fathers' belief systems, which subsequently shape their attitudes on childcare.
iii. The domain of **practice** relates to the investigation of the various *enhancers* and *obstructors* to Malay-Muslim fathers carrying out their parental role.

1.1 Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated to provide direction for this research:

i.   To examine the socio-cultural factors that serve to guide Malay-Muslim fathers in Singapore when carrying out their parenting roles.
ii.   To identify strengths and challenges to effective parenting faced by Malay-Muslim fathers relating to the three specific domains of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice.
iii. To highlight areas where intervention frameworks can be designed to overcome the identified challenges.

The findings derived from this primarily qualitative study will provide impetus for organisations and stakeholders to not only design **intervention initiatives** to address identified challenges faced by fathers in the community, but to also organise follow-up research, especially one that will provide a basis for comparisons between fathers across all ethnic groups in Singapore.

1.2 Background to the Study

According to the Singapore Fatherhood Public Perception Survey conducted by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), 97% of Singaporeans are of the view that fathers play an important role in their children's lives (2009). This is supported by a study of juvenile delinquents by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Singapore Prisons Service (SPS) where it was found that at the national level, about half of our young offenders were from divorced, single or reconstituted families and were reported as having had poor relationships with their fathers (2013). Most recently, findings from a study by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) indicate that children whose parents committed drug offences are 5.18 times as likely to be convicted of an offence themselves, compared with 2.3 times for children whose parents committed non-drug-related offences (2021). According to the Straits Times which reported on the research findings, the implication is that "children whose parents had

committed drug offences have comparatively worse outcomes than those whose parents had committed non-drug offences" (2021). This is unfortunate news for Singapore's Malay community as the 2019 Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) Annual Report reflected that while the number of those arrested for drug offences increased across all ethnic groups, the majority, or 1,743, of them are Malays. In the course of that year, Malays also made up the biggest group among new abusers with 689 arrested (2019). Based on the fact that offenders are predominantly male (Statista.com, 2020), the extrapolation from these highlighted issues suggest that, when compared to the other ethnic groups, Malay children maybe more at risk of developing behavioural impairments caused by the lack of fatherly guidance in the affected families.

While academics such as Quah (1999) had conducted studies focusing on the Singaporean family, the issues that largely pertained to the different approaches to parenting. These include the various dimensions of familial relations that determine the success of a family — such as tradition, affection, values transmission, discipline, patterns of interaction, careers, internal and external stressors, and coping strategies. These findings, while of value, however, do not dwell on the socio-cultural specificities of ethnic groups such as the Malay-Muslim community. Ang (2006) was closer to home in her study of fathers in the Asian context, which, among other societies, looked at the Malay family. Her study revealed that fathers' involvement in the lives of their children impacts the adolescents' self-esteem, interpersonal relations, sense of adequacy, and attitudes to school. For Malay families specifically, the paternal parenting style was shown to be closely associated with the development of the child's sense of self-reliance. She argued that for such families, it is critical to consider how fathers can be made to be more positively involved in parenting tasks, because the "paternal parenting style was more influential than the maternal parenting style in influencing adolescent outcomes" (p. 503). Nevertheless, the study concluded that "the degree of involvement of fathers in the socialization of adolescents is lower than mothers" (p. 511).

Other research focusing specifically on Malay fathers also maintained that there are certain factors that make the duties of a Malay father and his relationship with his children unique when compared with that of other ethnic groups. Juhari et al. (2013) in their study of paternal involvement among Malay-Muslim fathers in Malaysia highlighted that "education, marital equality, and number of children" (p. 210) in the family were deciding factors on the quality of a Malay-Muslim father's involvement in his children's lives. On top of this, fathers' perceptions of their own fathers' involvement when they were young is also positively associated with their current involvement with their own children, supporting the concept of intergenerational fathering in social learning theory (ibid).

In essence, while much research has already been conducted regarding outcomes linked to the parenting skills of fathers, dimensions of the issue specifically relating to the socio-cultural context of the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore has yet to be extensively touched upon. The most relevant literature that has been made available is only from research conducted exclusively among Malay-Muslim fathers in Malaysia. While the findings may provide some resonance to the context of Singaporean Malays, we can never be certain that this is exactly the case until research has been conducted to specifically focus on Malay-Muslim fathers in the country.

Thus, in the context of the Singaporean Malay-Muslim community, knowledge gaps exist still in certain domains impacting the parenting skills of fathers. This thus underpins the rationale for this study.

In its essence, this research project has investigated the ways in which Malay-Muslim fathers carry out their parental roles from the socio-cultural lens of the ethnic community, specifically within the domains of **knowledge**, **attitude**, and **practice**. It must be noted however, that this study is intended to be **exploratory** in the way it attempts to undertake an overarching examination of all issues relating the mentioned socio-cultural domains. The main objective is to highlight various areas of concern surfaced by extensive insights harnessed from the qualitative data collected. Nevertheless, the study does not make claims asserting that the identified strengths or challenges are particular only to fathers from the Malay-Muslim community. Follow-up research, if conducted, may provide evidence that there are similar issues faced by the other ethnic communities in Singapore.

The findings from this study can nevertheless be the impetus for relevant organisations to put in place intervention programmes and initiatives where best practices can be identified, shared and challenges resolved.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to provide direction for this research:

i.   What are the socio-cultural factors which serve to guide Malay-Muslim fathers in Singapore when carrying out their parenting duties?
ii. What are the strengths and challenges to effective parenting faced by fathers from the Singaporean Malay-Muslim community especially those within the domains of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice?
iii. What are the areas that can be focused on to overcome the identified challenges?

Chapter 2: Overview of the Research

2.1 Methodology

The information gathered for this study comprise primarily qualitative data which is supported by secondary research. The qualitative data was collected by means of in-depth, face-to-face interviews.

2.2 Qualitative in-depth interviews

In the qualitative data collection phase, we conducted a series of in-depth, face-to-face interviews with respondents. The issues identified by the literature review on issues faced by fathers, especially those from Asian communities, were used to inform the structure of the interview.

This qualitative dataset employed a quota sampling approach, which consists of (i) 50 fathers; (ii) 10 mothers; and (iii) 10 children. These respondents were selected based on the diversity of their socio-economic backgrounds. The respondents selected had to belong to one four income brackets – low, low-mid, mid-high and high. Such a method of quota sampling was employed to tease out potential dissimilarities resulting from fathering subcultures among those in the Malay-Muslim community. The hypothesis is that these may shape dominant fathering practices among the individuals concerned. The in-depth interviews were conducted between September 2020 and March 2021.

A series of additional interviews with 10 mothers and 10 adult children were conducted as a means of triangulating the information collated from the interviews with fathers. The face-to-face interview sessions were conducted exclusively in Malay or English or in a mix of both languages depending on the preference of the respondents. The individuals quoted in the report are identified by their age and educational level so as to provide the reader with the context that underlies their responses. Each interview session was subsequently transcribed and thematically analysed.

Chapter 3: Baseline Indicators

The interview participants involved in the data collection exercise comprise 50 fathers, 10 mothers and 10 adult children. The fathers were between the ages of 23 years to 65 years. The 10 mothers were between the ages of 25 years to 47 years and the 10 adult children who were interviewed were between the ages of 18 years to 47 years. In terms of academic credentials, the participants range from those who completed primary education to those who have attained postgraduate qualifications. With regards to marital status, a majority of the fathers are from intact families. 2 fathers however never married and another 4 of the fathers interviewed were widowers. Another 5 fathers interviewed were divorcees.

In addition, the fathers we interviewed resided in a diversity of residential homes – from rental homes in HDB units all the way to a smaller minority who live in a landed property. Correspondingly, the personal and household incomes also lie along a spectrum between those earning less than $2000 per month to fathers earning an income of more than $10 000 per month.

During the interview, respondents were asked how they would best describe themselves as Muslims. Nearly all indicated that they adhered to Islamic teachings. Of these, almost half stated that they followed Islam strictly, while the remaining half indicated they did so moderately. 2 fathers admitted that they only loosely followed Islamic rulings. These figures indicate that Islam still exerts considerable influence on fathering practices within the Malay-Muslim community.

Lastly, we asked fathers who we interviewed to tell us the cultural tradition they most strongly identified with. Almost all identified with the Malay cultural tradition although 5 interviewees admitted that due to their mixed heritage, the culture that they practiced is a hybrid of Malay and Indian, Chinese or Arabic cultures.

A final "big picture" indicator can be seen by the way the Malay-Muslim fathers were asked to indicate the qualities they expected of good fathers. The list below reflects their frequently chosen characteristics of an effective father.

I. Raising children who are academically and religiously inclined
II. Nurturing a loving and close knit family unit
III. Establishing a financially stable household
IV. Ensuring plenty of opportunities to spend quality time with family
V. Imparting "life lessons" and values to children, which are cultivated through play and discipline

Chapter 4: How Islam Frames the Community's Fathering Practices

In this chapter, we present the first of three main findings from the research. The chapter reveals the extent to which Islam is seen as a framework that shapes the fathering practices of Singaporean Malay-Muslims. The findings pertaining to the role of Islam are categorised under the following sub-headings:

   i.Islam as a way of life.

   ii.Islam as a key source of fathering knowledge.

   iii.Religiosity as a social-status enhancer.

In a study conducted by Juhari et al. (2013) on fathering practices among Malay-Muslim fathers in Selangor, Malaysia, the researchers found their participants' parenting style to be rooted primarily in Islam and Malay culture. Most significant is the perceived role of these two factors as a guide for nurturing their children into good and successful individuals who lead God-fearing lives. Fathers as authority figures are tasked to instil in their children both worldly and religious knowledge. Specifically, instilling Islamic faith into their children will ensure that the characters of these young individuals are properly moulded, serving them well in this life and the Hereafter. While fathers are also expected to be the financial provider for the family, research by Yeung (2013) maintains that religion remains a noteworthy influence on parenting practices among Asian families. Our findings on Malay-Muslim fathers concur in that Islam is regarded by participants as the main source of knowledge which they defer to when seeking guidance on parenting practices.

As an aside, it is also interesting to note that responses on the role of Islam, as articulated by many participants during the interviews, is often accompanied by the following reactions:

   i.Variation in personal levels of understanding of the religion (as reflected by some participants' show of knowledge, or lack of, during their interview sessions).

   ii.Wariness by some respondents that prevented them from offering more candid responses in their self-reports during the interviews. This probably arose from a natural desire to "save face", a trait common among Asian communities (Liao & Wang, 2009). This occurred during discussions involving sensitive issues, especially those touching on familial relationships and religious practices.

The methodology we adopted allows us to examine our participants' responses in relation to their familial backgrounds so as to identify differences in the knowledge, attitude and practice in their parenting approaches.

4.1 Islam as a Way of Life

This segment explains how Islam functions both as an intrinsic and extrinsic motivating force shaping the way fathers carry out their parental roles. As reported by most of our respondents, Islam guides and shapes their aspirations of being involved and effective fathers. For instance, according to one of the fundamental precepts of Islam, respect and care must be accorded to parents as essential values of filial piety. This is seen to be a means of attaining salvation in the Hereafter and is thus an essential responsibility of a Muslim. As such, a Muslim father is obligated to fulfil his duty of being a filial son to his parents. He is similarly expected to impart

and cultivate such sensibilities to his children. Further, Muslims are encouraged to maintain close ties and relationships with their immediate and extended families to sustain family unity. This is the presented rationale for creating close-knit families. In Islam, these are seen as acts of *ibadah* (worship) (MUIS 2018a; MUIS 2018b). The father below exemplifies this:

> "I think most important is how you show love to your parents, like that is very important to me. So, my kids will see how well I treat (my) parents, and see how well my wife treats her parents." (38, graduate)

The interviews provided other examples emphasising the role of Islam in setting the way Malay-Muslim fathers carry out their role as parents. The qualitative data that we collected provided us with examples of religious activities in which fathers involve their children such as the mandatory *solat* (prayer). In fact, many respondents engage in *solat jamaah* (congregational prayers) with their children as they generally acknowledge this to be an opportunity for consistent and frequent family interaction while at the same time enhancing one's connection with *Allah* (God). In fact, many of the fathers we interviewed admitted that they had attempted to expose their children to such acts of worship even when they were very young and might not yet understand the significance of the activity.

Respondents also surfaced other religiously prescribed father-child activities that they participate together with their children. These include mosque visits, *puasa* (fasting), *sahur* (pre-dawn meal during the fasting month) and *iftar* (breaking fast). Inputs by adult children interviewees revealed that at their young age, they would usually look forward to the last two activities as they involved delicious meals with family members.

In the excerpt below, a respondent elaborates on the tendency of his young children to lose focus when partaking in such religious activities.

> "Usually... when we get home, we will *maghrib solat jemaah* (perform the sundown congregational prayers).... The children will sometimes play on the *sejadah* (prayer mat) as I'm praying.... They'll sit around the prayer mat .... Sometimes they mimic my movements when I pray." (26, N-level holder)

The young father remained determined and completed these activities even when his children lost interest during such occasions as he hoped that his actions would still provide them with a learning opportunity.

Some fathers highlighted various religious doctrines to assert the importance of bonding well with the family. For example, these respondents evoked concepts extrapolated from the *hadiths* (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad) as motivation for their desire to be good fathers. Unfortunately, for some fathers, like the one below, this was something they were unable to achieve.

> "[To be a good] Muslim father. I would say, *macam* (is like) bonding, ah. A lot of bonding... I'm quite jealous actually... when I heard my friends can [bond with their family members]. But sad to say, my family members *tak gitu* (is not like that)." (33, Higher NITEC)

Based on the qualitative data, respondents reported positive outcomes arising from their faith-based approach to fatherhood. They felt they had derived personal and relational benefits when applying an Islamic-centred approach to their nurturing framework. This is especially effective in areas of moral guidance, enforcing discipline as well as strategies to cope with stressors in life.

4.1.1 Being a Good Muslim as the Epitome of Being a Good Father

When asked to select the qualities of a 'good father' from among several options, the majority of respondents selected being a good Muslim as the most necessary quality. This is subsequently followed by being an exemplary human and being a kind and generous person. The choices made by these respondents enabled us to determine Malay-Muslim fathers' perception of the qualities required to be a "successful" parent.

The rational for their choices were elaborated when these individuals were probed further. For instance, many respondents articulated their desire of meeting up to the ethnic and religious community's societal expectations of what a Malay-Muslim father should be. More often than not, being a good Muslim is a constant refrain in levelling up to such expectations. For some others however, the wish to be a good Muslim and becoming a role model for their children was an aspiration that extended beyond meeting community benchmarks. In striving towards becoming the best father they could be, our respondents reported that they actually felt a sense of self-satisfaction in the journey itself. This is in line with studies that tell us that the individual's want and subsequent attempts at achieving "successful" fatherhood itself contributes to increased happiness and health (Levtov et al., 2015).

Our respondents also reported feeling proud when they saw themselves attaining qualities ascribed to involved fathers. Those who were confident of labelling themselves as "involved fathers" were typically more satisfied and happier with their status as a parent.

> "I value both my work and family time. And I am deeply engaged in her [his child's] development. When I'm home, I make the point to read to her, to shower her, to play [with her]. Just being around. Have breakfast, cycle together, spend time with her. This structure [of keeping Friday and weekends free to spend time with daughter] was planned." (40, graduate)

These fathers reflected a more positive outlook of themselves, compared with those who repeatedly reference barriers such as the lack of time or financial constraints impeding their fathering practices.

4.1.2 Learning From Others

All respondents indicated their interest to be a positive influence in the lives of their children. Many expressed wanting to lead by example in every aspect of their children's life, especially in being an adherent of the Islamic faith. In a typical display of Malay modesty perhaps, none of the respondents outrightly claimed to be model fathers and instead made it a point to highlight their personal shortcomings such as their lack of fathering know-how and perceived inadequacy of Islamic knowledge. Many fathers also cited constraints brought about by the lack of time spent with their children due to work commitments.

When respondents were asked which qualities of a father they considered to be most exemplary, almost all chose that of being a good Muslim as their top choice. In this respect, fathers look to emulate standards set by prominent figures in the religion, with the most important individual being Prophet Muhammad. Fathers are thus encouraged to follow in the prophet's footsteps, specifically in the way they managed their household and how they interacted with family members.

However, when probed deeper for a current role model, most respondents could not think of one whom they can look up to and emulate fathering behaviours and practices that are appropriate for the present Singaporean Malay-Muslim context. When pushed to name a current personality who they think qualifies a role model, few cited their own parents. Instead, a few more referred to local Malay-Muslim personalities such as Ustaz Dr Fatris Bakaram (the previous Mufti of Singapore) as a possible candidate.

> "I cannot give you an answer… But if you talk to me presently, who I like… like a good fellow: Dr Fatris Bakaram. He's a good Muslim." (60, Graduate)

When asked for reasons why their parents never made it to their list of role models, many respondents, while praising their parents and stating how grateful they were to the former for nurturing them during their growing up years, they nevertheless felt that there were aspects of parenting which they could have done better. In this respect, our respondents voiced that they wanted to learn from their parents' mistakes. In doing so, they aimed to strive to be better parents.

Apart from reasoning that their parents had their shortcomings, there were also other factors listed by respondents for adopting a different parenting style from their own fathers. These include the changing set of familial needs and conditions across different generations, the transformation of values (e.g., the need to work hard by way of performing laborious tasks of yesteryear as opposed to an appreciation of working smart today), as well as the rapid development of information and communication technology (e.g., internet and social media) which was not available in the previous generation of fathers.

> "I still look up to them in certain ways, but with some adjustments to how I bring up [my] kids compared [with] how they brought me up." (39, Diploma holder)

This dearth in identifying fathering role models among Singaporean Malay-Muslim fathers could be addressed by organising mentoring programmes aimed at overcoming the shortfall of exemplary fathers and paternal figures. This will be most effective especially for those who are unable to turn to their own social networks for adequate support and guidance. The mentoring initiative was suggested by a few of our respondents during our interview sessions. This is also supported by past literature on the effectiveness of the mentoring process where research shows that interacting with caring adults had resulted in at-risk youths exhibiting fewer hostile manners towards others and themselves (Lemay et al., 2010; Powelson, 2004).

4.2 Islam as a Key Source of Fathering Knowledge

A question focusing on the important aspects of fathering knowledge that respondents would like to improve on revealed that most of the fathers spoke about the need to improve their knowledge of Islam to better perform their fathering duties. Specifically, their hope is that greater knowledge in the faith will enable them to better instil in their offspring proper Islamic values.

Practically all respondents believed that Islam provides an ideal framework on parenting and saw it as a "manual" that provides the best form of moral guidance to carry out fathering practices. This extends to the belief that meticulously following principles set by the faith will allow adherents to live successful lives both in this world and the hereafter. In the following extract, a father articulated his belief in abiding by Islamic law and tradition with hopes of passing this conviction to his children.

> "Because we all [born] into this world as a Muslim. Then you agree to the religion *Muslim* (Islam). So we must follow our Messenger right. Like whatever he told us, like eat *halal* food. *Ya so kita kene ikut lah* ("So we have to follow"). Whatever they chose. It's for our *kebaikan* ("own good")" (33, Higher NITEC holder)

During their interview sessions, a few fathers perceived that being a good Muslim was equivalent to being a good person and a good Singaporean citizen; and these fathers aspired to impart the belief onto their children as well.

> "[Being] Muslim is a way of life.... It involves everything in our aspect of life. To become a law-abiding citizen... also encompasses the way Islam taught us to be. So, being an exemplary human being comes naturally if you are a very good Muslim. You abide by all the regulations or rules stipulated in that particular area, you become a good example of a human-being." (39, Diploma holder)

The sentiments exemplified in the above-mentioned excerpt are shared by many of our respondents. These fathers equated being a good Muslim father to being a law-abiding individual, of which qualities they intended to impart to their offspring.

It is also worth noting that very few fathers who were interviewed considered improving their knowledge on the passing down of *adat* (Malay custom and tradition) and *adab* (Malay etiquette and religiously-dictated mannerisms) to their offspring as a top priority. This is despite inputs from an earlier part of the interview process where most fathers spoke about following the Malay cultural tradition.

Although the passing down of *adat* and *adab* was least considered by the majority of respondents in lieu of enhancing personal knowledge of Islam, qualitative data obtained from our interviews do indicate that Malay-Muslim fathers still see the former as an important factor. From the feedback collected, some fathers emphasised the significance of inculcating notable Malay cultural values in their offspring. These respondents expressed the importance of maintaining the Malay identity so as to establish boundary-settings of what is culturally acceptable for a Singaporean Malay-Muslim.

> "Malay values are important, because it instils *hormat* ("respect"). From there, Malays can develop discipline so that they can respect others and follow the law to be good citizens in Singapore." (62, Primary school education)

The fall in prioritising the nurturing of ethnic identity in children may need to be further researched.

4.2.1 Finding solutions to fathering issues

The way religious knowledge is epitomised can be further evidenced by the responses in relation to the question of what sources fathers would most likely turn to when seeking solutions on fathering issues. The following three sources of knowledge were mentioned the most, namely: by observing and interacting with others; from *khutbah* (sermons) and *kuliah* (lectures) in mosques; and from available literature (e.g., books, religious texts, print articles, online articles).

When asked to elaborate on the reasons for their choices, most of our respondents brought up examples that were in line with their Islamic beliefs. For example, in explaining why their first choice was "interacting and observing others", some respondents would reason that this is because they wish to identify and emulate behaviours and practices which they believed to be exemplary and recommended in Islam. Furthermore, respondents tended to choose and seek advice from individuals whom they felt were more religiously inclined. Also, when turning to literature, many respondents said that they tended to seek advice and fathering knowledge in books, articles and online videos that are centred on Islam.

> "[When my children ask] religious questions, then *susah nak jawab* ("difficult to answer") ah. That one I really don't know what to say already. That's why from there I ask my father, then I ask [my] in-laws. Then they teach me how to explain ah." (24, NITEC holder)

According to our respondents, Islamic doctrines provide its followers with guiding principles for fathering practices. This by default makes it their primary source of fathering knowledge. These fathers highlighted Quranic texts and relied on the *sunnah* and *hadith* (acts and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), which are transmitted through religious literature, sermons, informal information-sharing and videos through online and offline media. These are cited as significant sources of fathering knowledge.

Many respondents also further clarified their choices by explaining how they interpreted the options offered in the questionnaire during our interviews. For example, some of the respondents mentioned that they considered *khutbah* and *kuliah* to also include online and international sources in addition to the conventional mainstream Friday sermons delivered in local mosques.

> "I tend to find out as much as possible from any sources... I mean, as long as long as it's a legit one ah. Let's see, I chose like *kuliah* and *khutbah* (religious classes and sermons), because I mean, nowadays it is very easy for us to get all this online. You know you go YouTube you "*dengar from ustaz ni, ustaz tu*" (hear from this and that ustaz). It's always good knowledge information, to gather from them from in terms of religious aspect." (33, Diploma holder)

Some respondents further recommended some adjustments to be made to the local *khutbah* in the mosques, suggesting that the overall theme and topic of choice should be less "philosophical" but instead more practical and directed towards its application in the everyday

lives of the local Malay-Muslim community. Some of the respondents expressed that they would like the *khutbah* to be more relevant and "advice-centric".

> "... they [*khutbah*] lack topics on parenting. Or parenting guidance. And even if they were to touch on parenting guidance, [maybe] they just want to elaborate on one point — just touch on prayers. So, if let's say you're going to have one hour of *khutbah* touching just on prayers. What is the ... takeaway for people who want more [practical] advice? They spend almost one hour just listening to [the topic of] prayers? And it can be very philosophical… in such a way that the Ustaz just talk about "Oh, *kalau kita sembahyang, kita punya errr kehidupan*… ("If we pray, our lives...). It may be very 'philosophical'. I'm not so well versed [in these theological approaches]." (35, Diploma holder)

4.2.2 Transmission of Islamic values

When respondents were asked to prioritise what they consider to be their most important responsibility as fathers, the following three aspects were highlighted: instilling Islamic values in their children, ensuring that their children do well in their chosen areas of interest and guaranteeing that their children do well in their studies. The aspect often highlighted namely, instilling Islamic values as their most important responsibility is evidently in line with hopes for their children to grow up to become good Muslims. It complements the response from a previous question on areas they would like to improve on in relation to fathering, where most respondents decidedly mentioned "improving their knowledge of Islam".

Additional qualitative data tell us that there is a compelling desire among Malay-Muslim fathers for their children be cultivated with Islamic sensibilities; or at the very least for their children to abide by the basic tenets of Islam. For instance, many of the fathers interviewed admitted that the way they interact with their immediate social networks, notwithstanding intergenerational differences, have been shaped by Islamic norms and expectations. Consequently, they saw themselves as becoming positively conditioned to uphold and continue to pass down their beliefs and practices onto their children.

> "So, they [my father and father-in-law] taught me how to become a very good Muslim: do your prayers, five pillars of Islam, uh do good things, always be responsible for your family. These are some of the things which I [will] carry on forever. It's going to be a legacy in my family and my future generations to come." (39, Diploma holder)

4.2.3 Islamic values as a strategy to overcome personal hardships and struggles

In their interviews, respondents emphasised that for them, Islam served as a 'manual' for how to live every aspect of their lives. Nevertheless, our qualitative data show this impact on fathers to vary depending on the stage of their family life-cycle and the dynamics of their interpersonal relationship with their family members. For instance, during his younger days, a respondent admitted that he was a troubled youth. While his own father did not directly cause his positive transformation, the former was wise enough to identify a change agent by way of instructing his brother-in-law to guide him. This individual was able to instil religious knowledge in specific ways, causing him to realise and rectify his wayward behaviour.

"... so he [my brother-in-law] knew how to handle me. So, I think my parents talked to him and said [that] I'm a different breed.... He knows how to handle me, lah. So he introduced me to *silatan ruqyah* (a study of mystical Islam).... Then [I began to] to penetrate [and actually understand] Islam.... All the religious teachings, I [already] know the basic lah. I [already] learnt a lot during *madrasah*.... [But] then I learnt [this form of Islam] in more detail, after that I changed [for the better]." (38, Graduate)

4.2.4 Differing methods of Islamic knowledge transmission

Although almost all respondents abide by a common set of Islamic principles, the interviews reveal that Malay-Muslim fathers may align themselves to diverse pathways when it comes to the overall approach taken towards the development of their children. In this study, the differences are seen across the socio-economic spectrum. Other studies also posit that education and age may have an impact on perceptions of parenting practices and nature of involvement with their children (Newland et al., 2013; Weisner 1984; Fantuzzo et al., 2000).

4.2.5 Directing versus self-exploration

While the interviews reveal parenting styles that are typically directive in nature (i.e., the father provides instructions and his children follow), the qualitative data also reveal differences in parenting approaches taken by a group of Malay-Muslim fathers in the way they encourage self-exploration throughout their children's journey of discovering their religious and personal interests. Instead of imposing their wants onto their children, it was highlighted that these parents' chose to recognise their offspring's individuality and agency in personally realising their religious beliefs. These fathers see themselves more as a guide rather than the unequivocal leader of the family who enforces his religious beliefs or aspirations onto his children. Instead of demanding blind obedience, he parents by counselling and providing rationale where he thinks necessary.

Notable and common Malay phrases mentioned by our respondents when describing how this strategy has led their children's religious self-enlightenment include *hati tergerak* ("moving the heart") and *hati terbuka* ("opening of the heart"). These notions, they clarified, are embedded in Islamic doctrine that espouse that conviction of faith is, ultimately, divinely conferred into the hearts of individual Muslims through the Will of Allah (God).

"It's gratifying when you [are able to] teach your child something, right? But [it is even more gratifying] if the child discovers something [on his/her own] — and this is just my point of view — and he sees it for himself. It opens up his [own] mind." (49, Graduate)

"For children to accept it (i.e., religious knowledge) is way harder because we need have some kind of balance.... We cannot be too aggressive. At the same time, you cannot be too lenient. You [need to] know when [it's] time to directly tell them, 'Hey, you cannot do this, because of religion.' But, of course ... even teaching him like that will not [necessarily] make my son a good person. He might not even do [it]... *Kata orang takde hati* ("People say lacking the heart") ah! There's no heart to do all this." (46, Secondary school education)

4.2.6 Madrasah education

In a study by Cockcroft et al. (2009) on reasons for Pakistani parents enrolling their children into a *madrasah* (Islamic religious school), their desire for their young dependents to attain an Islamic-based education was cited as the most significant reason. They felt this to be their religious obligation, both as parents and as Muslims as "real success comes through following the teachings of Islam" (2009, 346). These sentiments are similarly reflected by many of the Singaporean fathers we interviewed. It is important to note that in our local context, the *madrasah* referred to by respondents are usually the weekend *madrasah*. These are institutions designed to function as a source of supplementary Islamic education to teach Muslim children who attend secular national schools during weekdays.

> "Err but at that point of time I think, I think I was just err (clicks tongue) just going for the sake of going lah because that's what my parents wanted me to do, right? And I'm doing the same with my kids now, lah! I just send them for weekend *madrasah*. Which is like what? I think three hours… or four hours." (37, Graduate)

The above excerpt however tells us that for some of the fathers that we interviewed, the objective of sending their children for a *madrasah* education came from learnt behaviour rather than direct intention.

Our data additionally reveal that regardless of income bracket, some of these fathers confessed that they chose to send their children to the *madrasah* more precisely to address their own perceived inability to transmit religious knowledge to their children. Many attribute this to their lack of religious knowledge and lack of time. Aware of their personal shortcomings in this aspect, they look to other sources to address this perceived need.

A respondent explained this during his interview. He elaborated on the practical value of Islamic education on his children, especially in preparing them for life after death. He spoke of the many moralistic lessons that could be imparted to his children through this educational process. Highlighting his own perceived lack of Islamic knowledge, he explained that he was reluctant to learn the religion when he was much younger. Now that he is much older, he needed to consult his own friends and *ustaz* (religious expert) to seek clarification on religious matters. He admitted that for him, this realisation on the need to continue attaining Islamic knowledge came at a later stage of his life. The experience made him more determined to provide his children with opportunities to learn more about Islam at the *madrasah*.

During his interview, a respondent gave himself a rating of 3 out 5 as a father. When asked why he rated himself as such, the individual pointed to his self-perceived lack of Islamic knowledge as a source of his insecurities.

Interviewer	What do you need to do to get a five? What's the primary thing?
Respondent	As a father?…. Basically being more involved in my children's [religious] education.
Interviewer	What is stopping you right now?

Respondent	It's the [lack of Islamic] knowledge because I'm preparing my kids for *madrasah* [education]. [But] I don't have the *madrasah* background to actually teach them.

<div align="center">(Unstated age, Graduate)</div>

Consistent throughout the interview is his belief that Islamic values and knowledge are essential to becoming a good person. Such sentiments allude to his belief that the *madrasah* is an ideal institution for the cultivation of such religious sensibilities. To him, the *madrasah* has value as it provides a holistic education, which focuses on spirituality and religiosity. While he found himself lacking in Islamic knowledge, he nevertheless wished for his children to attain religious knowledge and values, fulfilling this religious obligation as a Muslim parent.

4.2.7 Finding the Right Balance

Based on responses from some participants, the issue of transmission of Islamic values can sometimes also bring about questions on finding the right balance. For instance, many respondents emphasised notions of *redha* and *tawakkul* ("reliance and trust in God's plan") in the face of life's challenges. They provided examples such as economic hardship and personal shortcomings arising from an unfavourable external environment and personal circumstances. Informed by Islamic convictions, they would advise their children to perform sincere acts of worship such as prayer and giving of alms if they are faced with a dire situation. These perceived failings could then be alleviated if God wills it.

> "No matter how hard we try, He will assess us individuals. No matter how much effort we put in, but if our fate has been decided by God, then it is what it is." (43, O-Level holder)

> "If they have good Muslim values, their accountability is with the Divine, the Unseen. Everything else will fall in place." (52, Postgraduate)

This brings into question the balance required between the amount of effort needed for one to consider himself to have done as much as he can possibly do to attain success, to halting efforts in-lieu of the notion that God's will has already been put in place. The subjectivity involved in making such judgements may result in prematurely curtailing efforts in deference to the notion of God's Will.

A similar argument on finding the right balance can be made with regards to the amount of effort a parent should make to instil Islamic values in his child vis-à-vis values required to live comfortably in our current social setting. The example below relates to a Malay-Muslim father with a strong otherworldly outlook, specifically in his belief that "this life [on Earth] is only a test" and his family's orientation should be towards the Hereafter. As such, his emphasis in carrying out his fathering role is to ensure that his children develop the highest level of religiosity in their growing up years. This however, may result in very little emphasis in creating success for themselves in this world.

"... At the moment, in terms of parenting, I'm still trying to find that balance between the *duniawi* (life in this world) and *akhirat* (life in the hereafter).… If a person has values, they will naturally have that self-discipline in their daily life, right? Now being Muslims... like I said, now we are in a very different world [because there are more negative influences]. It's a bit harder to practise Islam in that sense because of all the different kinds of influences that is all around us. So, you know, if [the child] is able to grow up with, you know, basic grasp of Islamic way of life.... Hopefully, the rest will fall into place." (32, Graduate)

4.3 Religiosity as a Social-Status Enhancer

Religiosity can be defined as the set of encompassing beliefs, feelings, and behaviours consciously embodied and directed through the teachings of a religion (Nasution, 1986), which, specific to this study, is Islam. When talking about successful fathering and fatherhood, we noticed that some respondents took account of the perceived frictions between notions of conventional success (i.e., relating to academic and occupational outcomes) and embodied levels of Islamic religiosity and spirituality. For example, a common argument from some participants during the interviews focused on the concern over the incongruence of academic and religious successes: Although fathers or their children may be academically or vocationally successful, some interviewees felt that they could not be said to have found excellence in life as they were still lacking in religious knowledge. This was due to their impression of the failings of their religiosity, that these individuals cannot be deemed to be "truly" successful.

Here, our respondents were also critical of the label "successful father" endowed upon such a parent, as this does not take into account every aspect of success.

"He's a doctor [friend of family]. A very nice person. But in terms of religious values... not well equipped. So, like I said, ... I [may] respect you as a person. I respect your opinions. But if you ask me, I don't think that is a great achievement in life, lah. To each its own, lah.… When I say Islamic values, I'm talking in terms of like *aqidah* (belief) and errm… *akhlak* (morals). You know? The characteristics, the mannerisms. Because these qualities, they come from, erm, from what I believe, the best of people." (37, Postgraduate)

"For me, success means... not just the academics. [But] also [in matters of] religion. Because... I have seen doctors, I've seen engineers, who have memorised the Quran... which I can never find in Singapore. Maybe the closest I can find [here] are engineers who have memorised the Quran and who behaved very well. Because I find that if you want to classify yourself as a successful father, you must [first] call yourself a [true] Muslim. [Even] if you have done so well academically, that may not necessarily equate to proper upbringing of [our] children. (50, Diploma holder)

At the same time, while respondents revealed that they admired those who they saw as embodying Islamic values, many also stressed the need for balance in the quest to attain both religious and secular well-being. This is especially crucial when addressing issues of religious expectations imposed on children in the context of our current multicultural society. As exemplified by the extract below, these fathers see little value in nurturing children to become

highly practising Muslims if they are yet unable to establish positive relationships with others around them.

> "For example, for some people... *anak dia* (his child), you know really good. *Ugama dia kuat;* successful (His faith is strong, and he is successful). Okay, that's [to be positively attributed to] your [fathering] role. But unfortunately for some people, oh, *anak dia semua kaya raya* ("his children are all wealthy"). *Anak dia semua* doctor, engineer, *tapi gaduh dengan mak bapak* ("His children are doctors, engineers, but quarrels with the parents"). Is that successful [fathering]?" (49, Graduate)

Specific to Islam, all respondents in this study expressed that the central focus in their daily lives have always been to inspire religiosity in their children. For many, becoming dads in the family have shifted their orientations and mindsets towards improving their religious knowledge so as to be able to nurture their children to become better Muslims.

However, although this is cited as an ideal, many respondents recognised their personal limitations especially in the areas of personal will and time restrictions. It led to these fathers feeling stressed due to their inability to fulfil family expectations.

Chapter 5: Social Capital, Networks and Relationships

5.1 Social Capital as a Factor Towards Fathering Attitudes

Social networks exert significant influence on how our respondents perceive their role as fathers. This, in turn, determines the way they perform their parental role. Among our Malay-Muslim respondents, social networks in which they were a part function as a resource where a myriad of perspectives on parenting issues are considered. These subsequently serve to reinforce or weaken their existing beliefs towards parenting.

5.2 Parents, Spouse and Friends

Across all income brackets, fathers would rely on their immediate social network for support on fathering. Regardless of income level, most fathers would turn to their parents or parents-in-law for support in caring for their children. In this respect, almost half of the respondents were most likely to approach their parents or parents-in-law first when seeking advice on matters regarding fathering. Respondents who chose spouses or ex-spouses to seek advice from formed the next biggest group. The last of the top three biggest groups is made up of fathers who would turn to friends and acquaintances who were parents themselves. Nevertheless, they formed a significant number of fathers compared with those who chose the remaining options — which include turning to siblings or other relatives, religious experts (e.g., *asatizah*), non-religious experts (e.g., doctors and social workers), and friends and acquaintances who are not parents. The subsequent sections will provide elaboration on why these choices were made.

5.3 Parents and Parents-in-Law as a Social Support

Looking to our interview data, respondents reported that wisdom that came with age and experience was attributed as the factor why parents and parents-in-laws were their primary resource for social support.

> "I tend to get advice from my parents as well, because how I've been brought up is by them [sic] I think, *Alhamdulillah ("thanks be to God")*. I'm not saying I'm the best person but so far, *Alhamdulillah*. I think my parents brought me up well. So, of course, I will go back to them, *they makan garam sebelum kita* ("eaten salt before us"). So definitely I will ask them for their knowledge or experience. Both sides, from my parents or my parents-in-law, doesn't matter…. [But] I mean of course [while] we ask advice from our parents, but that is during their generation…. [However] there are changes in this current time. So, it's always good to share knowledge with [those from] your current generation. You know, whatever feedbacks [sic] or whatever that you can learn from each other, yeah? Then you impart whatever that you learn into your uhh… nurturing skill ah, yeah?" (32, Primary school)

Respondents who were contented with their parents' parenting style tend to grow up feeling satisfied with how they turned out and would subsequently look up to their parents for advice on how to raise their own children. In the same light, respondents with an observed high degree of trust and respect for their parents were more likely to reach out to their parents and parent-in-laws for advice on parenting. As exemplified by the excerpt above, respondents were also aware of the generational gap that might mitigate the effectiveness of parenting

techniques. Outdated parenting techniques or parenting styles that were deemed ineffective by the more discerning respondents were left out from their parenting practices.

Accessibility and convenience are contributing factors that encourage parents and parents-in-law to act as a key support system for Malay-Muslim fathers. Also, traditional Asian culture typically requires grandparents to play a significant role in raising their grandchildren. As such, extended family relationships are subsequently valued and prioritised (Edwards & Rothbard, 2005; Shwalb et.al, 2019). In essence, parents rely on grandparents for childcare arrangements either on an ad-hoc or daily basis.

> "Primarily it's my wife — the mother — because she's at home to see to their needs. As and when, it will be their grandparents if we need to run errands." (39, Diploma holder)

> "[As we both work], we would send him early in the morning, or the night before, to my mother-in-law's house. And then she …they [members of the household]… [would] take care of him. They [would] prepare him for school. And send him off to school. And after school, he [would] be back there." (35, Diploma holder)

While grandparents are depended upon as a support system to provide relief for parents, an unabridged reliance on grandparents can cause parenting stress (Parkes, A. et al., 2015; Newland, Chen, Coyl-Shepherd, 2013). Conflicts on parenting matters between parents and the grandparents can arise. Data shows that such parenting stress is common, especially among younger fathers who rely too much on their parents and parents-in-law for childcaring duties.

For instance, a father lamented about how his parents-in-law were over-feeding snacks to their grandchild — his daughter — and how this resulted in him being unable to control his child's eating habits. He felt a sense of frustration whenever he observed the frequency at which his in-laws fed his child with junk food. It reached the extent where the father felt helpless with the situation. It led to a response where he manages the problem indirectly by deflecting and putting off the grandparents' offer of junk food to the child whenever he can.

> "So I was like 'Wah! Then *macam mana*? ("how")?' It's quite often that they feed her [unhealthy] snacks. Then I was like, 'Eh come on, ah!' Pretty much I cannot do anything. But when I'm there, and they are there, I won't say no, but I say [to my daughter], 'Okay I think this is a messy food and I don't like mess. Can we save it [for] later when we are at home?' So, I will try to find ways to 'deflect' so at least it doesn't look so bad lah [and end up offending them]." (33, Diploma holder)

In addition, disagreements with his spouse on parenting methods added to his parenting stress. His wife becomes offended when he also tries to stop her from feeding his daughter with junk food. He relates that his wife would snap back at him, "*Eh aku nak kasi anak aku, nak tengok aku makan ni, tak boleh le*?" ("Can't I let my child eat it? Because I can't just let my child watch me eat right?")

Some respondents have an avoidant attitude towards displays of conflict. Therefore, disagreements are conveniently suppressed or avoided. Diplomatic manoeuvres to navigate

through conflicts, such as procrastinating and suppressing frustrations are preferred over familial transgressions. Reasons for this yielding attitude may point to a father's need to maintain the demeanour of respect towards his elders that is expected of a child towards the parent or to an elderly person. The fear is that failure to sustain this positive relationship may lead to a weakening of *silaturrahmi* ("familial bonds"). In addition, such "forced" agreeable displays are further reinforced by the pressure to role-model a pious stance in the eyes of the children.

However, displays of agreeableness and pressure to conform to the demands of the ethnic community add to parental stress among Malay-Muslim fathers. Feelings of burn-out, mental and emotional exhaustion were observed among some respondents. Feedback from respondents during the interviews found that a lack of capacity for boundary settings and healthy communication with other caregivers, mainly elderly grandparents, contribute to feelings of helplessness and discouragement among Malay-Muslim fathers as they are unable to navigate through conflicts effectively.

As illustrated in the excerpt below, one father recounts his negative experience with his own father, which resulted in a strained relationship between them.

> "… when things don't go his way, he can be a very aggressive. Like, he did beat me up…. Whatever he wants [he gets], because of that aggressiveness. [Until a time came] whatever he wanted me to do, I would not do it. I became a rebel. Because I didn't care. Because I didn't like to be forced. And, you know, to me, I believe that's one part of the reason why it [taught] me a lot [on how I should be as a father], when I got married [and] I got kids." (46, Secondary school education)

5.4 Co-Parents' Support

Fathers rely on co-parents (spouses, or ex-spouses) for support on financial matters. According to the overall study conducted, many fathers felt primarily responsible to maintain the financial responsibility for their children and the household.

This view is reflected with majority of respondents admitting that they conformed to societal norms concerning fathering practices. This indicates that the ethnic community still wields a strong influence in the lives of Malay-Muslim fathers. The expectation of fathers to be the main breadwinner of the family is an example of such societal norms. Specific to the context of this study, the pressure on Malay-Muslim fathers is thus to not deviate from the set societal conventions, especially those aligned with religious doctrine.

Income contributions, if provided by spouses or ex-spouses, are seen only as a bonus to the household. This little appreciation of the financial contribution by the co-caregiver remains constant regardless of factors such as the difference in the earning potential of the spouse, dual- or single-income households, age and marital status of respondents. In some cases, husbands see spouses working and contributing to the household income or contributing to

the financial maintenance of children only as a non-obligatory choice on their spouses' part, as the financial responsibility to maintain the household falls on the father of the children, regardless of whether he is the spouse or ex-spouse.

> *"Biarlah anak-anak akan ingat pada orang rumahlah. Itulah pada pendapat saya, kerana orang rumah pun ada banyak sacrifice untuk saya juga, untuk anak-anak. Dia sanggup kerja, tolong saya…. Alhamdulilah ah, kerana orang rumah saya dah dapat sign BTO.* ["Let the children remember their mother, because my wife sacrificed a lot for me and the children. She works to help me out. Thank God! Because of her, we were able to sign up for a BTO."] (32, married, primary school education)

5.5 Other Sources of Social Support

The study tells us that while most Malay-Muslim fathers primarily depend on their kinship ties with parents and spouses who make up their immediate social circle, as well as friends who are themselves parents for advice and support on parenting, unique circumstances faced by fathers also present unique opportunities to diversify their social networks. This may then lead to the development of new attitudes towards parenting. The capacity of social networks to shape attitudes of fathers on parenting depend on factors such as age, marital status, educational background, needs of children, and nature of work.

For instance, fathers of special needs children interviewed in this study displayed greater involvement in parenting despite enjoying good relations and getting much assistance from their immediate circle of support. As looking after special needs children require a different set of skills when compared with looking after neurotypical children, fathers of special needs children are however less likely to seek support from those who are less physically capable, for example, elderly grandparents. Fathers reported facing difficulties in explaining dietary restrictions of their children as well as issues such as differences in behaviours and the need for special considerations when it comes to social interactions, which may be affected by sensory stimuli. These fathers are also less likely to seek support from friends who are parents but do not have children with special needs. Instead, they find more comfort in looking beyond their immediate social circle for help and support, especially from people who are more informed in caring for special needs children such as specialists, and fellow parents of special needs children.

Fathers who have access to self-help organisations are also more likely to depend on professionals such as counsellors and social workers for their mental and emotional well-being.

5.6 "The Blind Leading the Blind": Skepticism Among Malay-Muslim fathers

Some segments of fathers have expressed doubts over the quality and credibility of fathering advice proffered by other individuals. A few individuals mention religious leaders, their own peers and even family members in a deprecating manner. Respondents shared sentiments of scepticism towards looking at formal and structured initiatives. For instance, professional help

like counselling to address parenting issues were offered to most fathers by specialised organisations when the need arose. These respondents however were hesitant to be involved. Instead, they preferred to seek advice from their own social networks. Some respondents, in fact, viewed professional counselling as a waste of time.

> "*Bila orang tanya 'Eh, nak kena pergi counselling, ke?'…. Pada saya, saya tak advice (untuk pergi), pasal… kebanyakkan lelaki, kalau dorang dah duduk kedai kopi*, they talk among themselves…. ["When people ask me if they should go for counselling, I don't advise them to go for it. Because most (Malay) men already like to sit at the coffeeshop and talk among themselves. What's the point you go to counselling?.... So might as well you talk at the coffee shop than you wasting time go counselling." (32, Primary school education)

In our interviews, many speak of the "blindness" of individuals to accepting knowledge or advice, which could have been beneficial to them. At the same time, there are also individuals that seem gullible to them, for being "uncritical" when receiving and subsequently implementing advice from vaguely qualified individuals.

Subsequently, this group of fathers is very selective when it comes to those whom they seek out for advice:

> "Okay for religious aspects... in terms of like to be a good Muslim [and a good father] …. So, I always seek knowledge from... experts like... my own *ustaz* (religious teacher) and all….[and] those who are with kids, lah. So, I ask for opinion and advice from them [as opposed to every other person]." (29, Nitec holder)

> "Friends are very subjective. Friends…. I need to know who I'm talking to. Plus, there are a lot of friends. Some friends, they are mature. There are also friends that are immature. So that's where the part… I draw a line when it comes to [asking] friends. Depends on who he is." (46, Secondary school education)

While the respondents' propensity to be critical can be taken as good practice, it can also be potentially harmful, as articulated by the respondent below. Here, he gave his observation of Malay-Muslim fathers where he attributed their inaction to be the result of wonton pride and ego. He explained this as the inability to receive good advice from others, including one's own children. This could potentially jeopardise familial ties.

> "Because we, our Malay-Muslim community tend to [be] very sceptical (of advice)…. Errr, they [i.e. fathers] tend to be very errr, 'thoughtful' [insinuating stubborn and proud]. I would say they like to think it over a hundred times.… [and yet not take action when there could have been a beneficial outcome if the advice had been taken up]." (50, Diploma holder)

5.7 Perceived Expectations of Wider Society

Adhering to specified sociocultural expectations of their immediate social networks as well as those of their wider society are significant to respondents' construction of their identity as fathers. For instance, evidence of social sanctions being internalised by our respondents can be seen in the way they self-report on the effort they put in to fulfil roles expected of fatherhood as set by their social networks (e.g., family, friends, colleagues). Many admit that these

expectations manifest themselves as motivators or stressors to their everyday lives by impacting them in two extreme ways: either as further impetus to upgrade and motivate themselves into becoming better fathers, or to further disparage them by wounding their self-worth. Such impacts on a father can determine the ways in which he proceeds to shape his interactions with his children.

> "I would give myself a four out of five [if I had to rank myself as a father]. Because my religion [is lacking]…. Other than that, it's okay. I'm very satisfied with the way [I'm raising my children]." (24, Nitec holder)

Remarks that allude to self-limiting or less-than-perfect opinions of oneself as a father — such as the one expressed in the excerpt above — are common because most respondents saw room for improvement to their fathering practices. Most prevalent among the obstacles cited are those pertaining to religion, time-restrictions, and knowledge of fathering practices.

We asked respondents what they thought the role of fathers in the family was. The breakdown of the top three roles ranked as most important to one that is least important are as follows: to secure financial well-being for the family; followed by to be the family disciplinarian; and lastly to be a source of moral guidance.

Malay-Muslim fathers see themselves foremost as the main breadwinners in their family, thus fulfilling social expectations of providing economic support to his family. This belief is further supported with majority of the respondents of respondents agreeing that they should be the breadwinners of their household.

A father's response during an interview session reiterates this point.

> "For the obvious matter, I'm... the breadwinner for my own family. So, the financial security has to be there, that comes as number one." (39, Diploma holder)

On the role of the family disciplinarian, a respondent explained:

> "Discipline encompasses everything. Finance, family matters… everything! What's most important are *akhlak* (morals) and *adab.* Children need to show good *akhlak* to their parents. I still admonish my children and grandchildren [if they don't show good *akhlak*]. I reproach them so they know that they've done something wrong." (65, Primary school education)

When asked why they selected moral guidance, many respondents indicated that this is to them more of an aspiration as they felt constrained by their limited knowledge on ways to impart proper values to their children, due to their external and situational circumstances (e.g., lack of free time). Because of their perceived lack of confidence in providing moral support to their children, many then turned to their wives for additional support.

> "And I rank the third one as moral guidance… [because] uhm, there's only so much I can guide them [his children] in terms of moral support, [because] of [lack of] time and freedom at work. Hence, I have to depend on my spouse to provide the guidance on my behalf." (39, Diploma holder)

5.8 Deviating From Social Conventions as a Malay-Muslim Father

In their efforts to conform to social norms, Malay-Muslim fathers reported that they tended to seek approval by turning to other individuals for advice and support.

That said, there have been anomalies. For example, we have among our respondents a young father who chose to marry and start a family while still pursuing his undergraduate studies. He did this against the advice of his family and friends. He remarked that his actions were seen as widely unpopular due to his lack of financial stability as well as his perceived immaturity among his peers and family. In other words, his was considered a rather unconventional decision as it went against societal view that young persons like himself should withhold any intentions of marrying early — at least until they have graduated and found a stable job.

> "That's why I deactivated [my] Instagram and Facebook... because the way I do things... I challenge most of the societal norms, so people don't really agree. Like for example getting married early, then getting a house while studying. Initially it was okay [after I put in some effort at convincing them] because I was very clear. But some days [their responses] were like, "your *iman* (faith) is weak'. Your morals are weak. Then, sometimes your own family members also like look down on you. That's where I feel that it can be quite challenging at times.... They [only] care about what's on the outside." (25, Graduate)

5.9 Overcoming Cultural Determinism: Malayness as a Disadvantage

Several respondents mentioned that being Malay in Singapore has been a disadvantage for them. This is due to their perceptions of past experiences with racial discrimination at either the personal or systemic level. Instead of confronting and possibly making their situation worse, these fathers chose to adapt to the situation by moderating their own behaviours. The changed behaviour was subsequently translated as improvements in the way they carried out their role as fathers.

> "I was finding my career path in my company because I was the only Malay guy. So, everyone looks down on me. Everyone bugged me [then]. So I needed to [act] *normal* and mature, lah. [As] the only Malay Singaporean in the [American] company … I told myself all this temper [is] not going [to get me] anywhere. So *macam matrep kan? Macam budak-budak muda* ("It's so like a typical Malay gangster, right? Like an immature youngster"). I needed to tone down so that it would not affect my life. So even now, when I'm with the kids, they never see me go crazy." (38, Graduate)

Some fathers we spoke to however did not seem to be able to adjust their negative outlook on being a member of the community.

> "The Malay culture does not really signify a Singapore citizen. It's just [that] we are brought up to showcase to other races that we are of Malay origin. Culture and traditions will come and go. It's not really important to be a true-blooded Malay in Singapore… because sometimes the term 'Malay' can turn out to be a disadvantageous situation for us. [Because] there are some job opportunities or some areas that don't 'require' a Malay to be part of it." (39, Diploma holder)

This finding is quite significant as it underscores the salience of ethnic-cultural identity in the ways our respondents lived their day-to-day lives. It dictates how certain fathers parent and have influence over the behaviour of their children. Nevertheless, such notions of internalised racism can sometimes be perpetuated by the respondents themselves. The excerpt below is extracted from an interview with a father who is also an employer.

> "... but it's true: when I have Malay guys working for me, they disappoint me. I try to groom them but they disappoint me. So, I said, 'Ok, enough! I think I won't take any more Malays. I see a Malay resume — I put aside." (38, Graduate)

Furthermore, some fathers expressed their disdain and discomfort with any emphasis placed on being Malay-Muslim in Singapore. They see this as spotlighting an inconsequential criterion over the wider encompassing distinction of being a Singaporean. In the excerpt below, the father ardently dismissed the significance of the Malay-Muslim identity when defining qualities of an ideal and successful father.

> "I believe we are all human beings and as males, we are skewed towards certain challenges. Why even put it in a narrow context? (i.e., examining what we do specifically as Malay-Muslim fathers). I don't believe in that.... [these questions) should not be directed towards a Malay-Muslim father. Whether you are Chinese or Indian... you just have to be a better father." (40, Graduate)

The passing down of *adat* and *adab* is ranked lowest in priority among our respondents. Here, the Malay culture and identity are not recognised as a constructive component of social capital by our respondents. Rather, in certain circumstances, instilling Malayness in their children is seen as a potential hindrance to them becoming successful individuals. Hence, these Malay-Muslim fathers think that enforcing Malay culture into the household is not a prime concern, when compared with the other qualities which more important in the eyes of the larger society.

5.10 Gender Roles

Most respondents believed that women are better suited for childcare than men. Despite this perception, most respondents expressed wanting to share the responsibilities of childcaring as equally as possible, including allowing for dual income and dedicating as much of their free time to parenting. Having said that, family circumstances — such as the family's economic status, marital status and having children with special needs, compared with neurotypical children — can trigger a change in attitudes of how childcaring responsibilities are divided between the husband and wife. The example below is from a father who takes the initiative to be more involved in caring for his child when the latter was struck by cancer. As can be seen, his child's illness probably triggered his change in fathering attitude.

> "Let's say, he's still in hospital during the weekends.... I'll be the one sleeping over lah.... if my wife is cleaning up the house then I will handle the young one ah. Like wash him up then after that prepare his breakfast and all that." (37, Graduate)

However, some respondents may tend to carry out their parental duties in a more traditional manner, where fathers go out to work to provide for the family while mothers staying home to look after the children. This unfortunately, causes these fathers to spend less time with their children.

In addition, most of our respondents tended to agree that women are better at managing the household than men.

5.11 Wives as Change Agents

Even though most respondents saw their wives as the better provider of childcare as compared with men, wives are nevertheless seen as potential change agents for their husbands to modify the latter's attitudes and take on a more equitable share of childcare duties. The expectations that some of our respondents have of their wives have been differently transformed in actual family life. This is because these wives have not allowed themselves to succumb to conservative societal norms such as not working and earning additional income in order to stay home to take care of the family. Depending on the way they manage the situation, wives do have the potential to play a role in changing the attitudes of their husbands.

> "So, my thinking last time was like, 'Okay so when I get married, my wife will prepare for me. I just sit down — like a boss. It's a different world now (laughs).... Expectations versus reality: My wife said, 'You can dream on.... I cook for you, good enough, ah.... If not, you can cook [for] yourself!' Now, I also have to take care of the kids." (33, Nitec holder)

In retrospect, fathers are still seen as the primary decision-makers in the family. However, wives are now increasingly playing an equitable role in some households. The change may be credited to factors such as having rigid working hours, higher educational levels or the dependency on other caregivers; factors that enable wives to take on a role that was previously the exclusive domain of fathers.

5.12 Value-Addedness of Family Ties

Some respondents in our earlier sections have acknowledged that membership in their social circles and networks have benefited them in terms of enhancing their personal knowledge on fathering. This is especially true with fathers who belong to social circles whose members are made up of intellectuals or experts from different fields and professions. These fathers are usually higher educated and belong to the upper echelons of Singapore society.

On the other hand, as related by respondents from the lower-income spectrum of Singapore society, there are fathers whose membership in networks and social circles had not been as beneficial to them. This is because individuals making up these networks usually share the same background, achievement levels, life experiences, worldviews, and mindsets. As such, instead of value-adding to one other's unique perspectives, fathers in the group are either "stagnant" in their knowledge of fathering, or even worse, end up concretising negative knowledge on parenting. This is due to the asymmetry of negative information that members develop with one another.

5.13 Ineffective Communication With Their Children: A Father's "Blind Spot"

Almost all the respondents agreed that they were able to communicate effectively with their children However, the benchmarks for effective communication are subjectively assessed by our respondents, based on their own perceptions and experiences. This could unintentionally

result in a potentially damaging "blind spot" where fathers overestimate their communication abilities with their children.

One of the benchmarks of "effective communication" lies in the compliance of children in abiding by their father's instructions. Older fathers who were interviewed showed satisfaction with the fact that their children adhered to their advice and instructions. During the in-depth interviews, the fathers were asked on reasons why they felt they were able to communicate effectively with their children. Some provided simple matter-of-fact responses.

> "*Dia dengar kata* (She listens to me)." (62, Secondary school education)

Our interviews with Malay-Muslim fathers revealed the challenges they faced throughout their journey of fatherhood, specifically in terms of adapting their communication styles to their children's various stages of development. This was made difficult due to the constantly changing family dynamics — making it a struggle for them to find suitable topics of conversation with their children. As a result, these fathers would end up feeling pressured to provide value-added knowledge to these father-child conversations. The emphasis now is on the cognitive-building aspect of the communication process rather than emotional bonding and trust building, which were emphasised when the children were younger.

> "As they grow up, being a parent [becomes] a dynamic responsibility. You have to constantly change and improve [on the] different aspects of communication. It used to be much easier when they were young. Now we are talking about complex issues and I need to read up about what they're concerned about nowadays. My kids read more widely…. I think it's something that I can improve on." (45, Graduate)

The respondents had the opinion that they were good communicators because they believed that they had helped their children overcome obstacles during the latter's growing up years. However, this opinion of themselves might not be shared by many adult children interviewed in the study. During their interview sessions, some of these children remarked that they had been hesitant in approaching their fathers and to speak openly on certain issues.

Our interviews with Malay-Muslim children revealed that while they saw their fathers as having successfully navigated complex topics, there were also issues that remained out of reach of these fathers, due to their children's lack of confidence in their fathers' ability to handle such situations. These respondents explained that they were concerned with their fathers' possible disapproval and the negative consequences that may arise from the discussion of specific issues. These issues include those that cover the themes of romantic relationships, expectations of the future, expectations from the family, and expectations of their conduct.

The perception of a father's lack of interest on certain topics also inhibits open communication. Such barriers to open communication between father and child restrict opportunities for fathers to be more involved in their children's lives. While some children were able to overcome these shortcomings of their fathers by relying on other suitable individuals to communicate with, other children reported difficulties in finding appropriate alternatives to discuss these issues with.

> "There were a lot of times when I felt I needed to talk to people about my [romantic] relationship but I didn't go to them [my parents] because I knew they wouldn't have a positive reaction to me having a relationship…. I still keep that part of my life away

from them. It's not like they ask as well…. It feels like it's a thorny topic to them. I feel like they don't want to know. Even if they ask, it felt half-hearted.... But [even] if I had something to tell, I'd probably tell my mum first, then my dad." (25, student)

Respondents also reported that their fathers tended to avoid conversations on topics that they did not have experience in, though it was essential to their children's lives.

"In my opinion, he shied away from those conversations.... He spoke to me about things that were comfortable to him — studies, job expectations, family expectations. Those were the things that he had experience with." (25, student)

Furthermore, though almost all our respondents reported that they communicated effectively with their children, a slightly lower proportion of these fathers thought that their children would seek their advice on issues concerning their personal life.

Despite the high level of affirmation, in their interviews, respondents expressed their hesitancy in participating in conversations whenever they are approached by their children to converse on matters concerning the latter's' personal lives. As previously mentioned in Section 5.11, most fathers lacked confidence in providing moral support to their children and instead looked towards their wives for assistance in such matters. This perceived insecurity translates to a certain awkwardness in their ability to communicate on deeper issues with their children. The indication is that an emotional distance exists between many Malay-Muslim fathers and their children, with many that were unfamiliar with the ways to close the gap.

"A taboo subject is about sex. That's something I find uncomfortable. I think it's one of the subjects that kids will read up by themselves. I don't remember my father talking to me about it when I was growing up as well. Like I said, it's a difficult topic to talk to your children about. Since my wife's responsibility is to do sex ed in school [i.e., the wife is a teacher]... [I] delegate that to her, especially to our daughter. I think we assume, especially for our son, [I] would get to him as he grows up." (48, Graduate)

Chapter 6: Time

According to our respondents, being a good father entails being able to spend quality time with their children to foster bonding between themselves and to effectively facilitate the transfer of life skills from father to child.

Life skills are defined as the set of "psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (Kauts & Kaur, 2016). Literature has shown that students with a high parental involvement have a higher life skill score than students with low parental involvement. In a study by Deepa Sikand Kauts and Gaganpreet Kaur, quality time spent by parents with their child "increases self-esteem, confidence, social competence, and life skills" (2016, K91). A similar outcome was observed by Amato (1994) with regard to quality father-and-child time having a positive outcome on the child's self-esteem and life skills.

Several respondents have emphasised that time spent with their children is precious to them. They have expressed the importance of "freedom of time" to initiate quality interactions so as to build closer ties within the family. Unfortunately, many of the respondents admitted that in reality, they rely on their wives to manage the household and care for the children, as they do not have the time to do so.

> "To achieve a five [out of five as a father] perhaps I could spend more time with them uhm... seeing to their day-to-day livelihood and basically spending more time with them… to get to know them and to teach them personally on aspects of life and religion. But uhm.., there's only so much [time that I can put aside] to guide them... [because] of time and freedom [that is limited by] work. Hence, I have to depend on my spouse to provide the guidance on behalf of me." (39, Diploma holder)

In the example above, the respondent revealed that the lack of quality time spent with his children was a striking obstacle towards advancing the development of his children's life skills. Concerned that certain aspects of his parenting competencies were thwarted by the lack of time, he turned to his wife to make up for his shortcomings. This includes duties such as imparting certain life lessons to his children. However, when he could find the time, as he explained later in the interview, he would take the opportunity to teach them lessons on leadership and effective communication.

> "I act. I give them examples of how they should lead certain things. I teach them. Basically I teach them life skills, and how they should communicate. Ahh... what they should do, what they shouldn't do."

In another example, a respondent with a set of young triplets, conveyed how challenging it was having to manage the needs of his three children. He mentioned that he would try his hardest to teach them important skills that he thought are important.

> "Again this is, uh, my wish to be there for them. To be more involved in building uh… life skills. Ya. Character, uh, their confidence, uh, imparting uh, your past experiences and all these. So that they can learn ahead rather than learn for themselves later.... So, so uh, if have more time with them — and having the right setting too — to give them that development and skills, that'll be nice lah. Ya, so again time has been a challenge for me." (46, Graduate)

This respondent disclosed that spending time with his children while they were young was crucial. He expressed the fear that they might end up learning less than other children in the same age group because of his and his wife's inability to efficiently teach and impart important life lessons to their triplets. He saw parental intervention and guidance as key to effective child-rearing practice. However, it appears as though he was resigned to his current situation, stating that:

> "I imagine I would have done better but I mean, they are growing up. I guess they have to find their own ways to learn the skills, lah. But we're always going to tell them uh… certain things, life skills, are important, right? Erm, me and my wife… tend to do things efficiently because we have to handle three of them all at one time. All the time. So logistically, uh, time management is a challenge… and the end is that their life skills may be less compared [with] others." (46, Graduate)

Although having triplets places him in a rather unique position, the sentiment of not having enough time to effectively impart life skills to their children is common for many respondents.

In the following example, another respondent said that imparting life lessons to his children was to him especially meaningful. He believed it to be his legacy — to positively impact and influence the lives of his children. Notably, he also included a religious dimension, appreciating Islamic values as much as other life values and skills. In his opinion, the aspect of transmitting life lessons and skills gave meaning to the quality time he spent with his children.

> "Yes. So, because when you go, you want them to know you for something. You know, my understanding is: whatever that we do, once we're no longer here, it's not for ourselves. But it's for the next generation. Whatever we impart, in terms of Islamic values, in terms of life values, life skills… whatnot… it's what we do right now. So, this is the most important time that I see right now. So, whatever we do with them, it will determine what they will become later. What they will think of you later. So, I try my best not to regret, lah. I try my best to have quality time with them." (38, Diploma holder)

6.1 Time as a Significant Variable to Effective Parenting

Various obstructors or enhancers of child-rearing practices were identified by respondents during the research process. As cited in the previous section, the most frequently cited obstacles are the lack of time and its adverse effects on Malay-Muslim fathers' ability to interact more with their children, thus preventing them from playing an effective role as a parent. Most of their time was prioritised for and dedicated towards the completion of various work commitments and other social responsibilities. This is ironic because in our interviews, almost all respondents expressed that they would prefer to direct their time towards cultivating a healthy parent-child relationship instead.

> "I [wish I] could spend more time with them, and *seeing to their day-to-day lives*. Basically, spend more time with them. To get to know them and to personally impart in them life lessons and religious teachings." (39, Diploma holder, emphasis our own)

Such obstructors are also reported to be compounded by a lack of knowledge of childcare, the inability to establish effective communication, and the uncertainty in reacting appropriately to their children's gender-based needs.

In this respect, a latent hypothesis can be made on the correlation between an increase in the availability of time and a subsequent improvement in effective parenting practices among our respondents. In short, if more time is made available for fathers to spend with their children, the expected result will be a strengthening in the bond between father and child. In the following segment, our findings shed light on the ways fathers utilise their time spent with their children. Next, the concept of quality time is examined to better understand its role in forging positive relationships between father and child.

6.2 Definitions of Quality Time

When asked if they were only able to spend quality time with their children during the holidays and weekends, the response from Malay-Muslim fathers was a resounding "yes!" The consensus among these fathers is that the lack of time had inhibited their efforts towards nurturing their child.

Majority of our respondents agreed that they were only able to spend quality time with their children during the holidays and the weekends.

> "Weekends, I tend to dedicate [more of] my own time to family time. Because that's one of the few days where I can make up for lost time during the weekdays — to spend quality time with them. So, we could be doing very random stuff. From just going to the supermarket, going to the malls, letting them play by the park, or meet up with their close friends for playdates and as well as to visit their grandparents, and their cousins. So, it's more of their own free time, i.e., how they want me to spend time with them." (39, Diploma holder)

Based on existing literature, quality time with children results from either one of these three distinct ways of planning: *structured planning, child-centred planning*, and *time-available planning* (Snyder, 2007). In our findings, Malay-Muslim Singaporean fathers looked at available time as a prime consideration when planning activities to do together with their children. In other words, they adopted the *time-available planning* approach.

When probed, our respondents revealed their notion of "quality time" to be any generalised amount of time spent between father and child regardless of whether the time together involves engaging in a meaningful activity.

> "...quality time with them will be spending with us ... being in their company from morning until evening, and I'm always in front of their eyes, be it having a meal together, seeing them, playing and they coming to and [from] us to seek knowledge, to always ask for opinion, to tell us, to guide them. And we enjoy together as a family without any interruptions or distractions from other things. And we go back happy. That I find, I define as quality time." (39, Diploma holder)

A large proportion of our respondents evaluated their effectiveness in parenting based on the duration of time spent with their children.

"I'm satisfied with my kid's development. But I would say that I did not play a very big part… because of the time spent. Again, the factor here is time. And maybe there were times where I was just too busy. And I felt that even though I had time with him, I couldn't channel… I couldn't channel him according to the plans that a free father, or a father who had ideas for his kid, will be able to do. Because... I find that I was tied up with lots of things." (35, Diploma holder)

The extract below describes a father who considered himself different from other Malay-Muslim fathers because his quality time with his children involved moments that brought about positive memories for the latter.

"I find that quality time is something memorable…. That is quality time, you know. Like if your child is happy, you also feel happy. You go outside [with them], you're also stress-free. So, to me, that is more like quality time. Compared [with] staying at home. Just with you and your child. That one is also quality [time to some fathers] but... it doesn't bring a memorable experience." (33, Nitec holder)

Differing notions of quality time conceived by our respondents mirror the variances in the nature of their jobs, stages of career progression and their income brackets. In addition, the age of the father, his marital status, and also the age and gender of their children are variables that give considerable context for one to understand their diverging perceptions of "quality time".

6.3 Ineffective Use of Quality Time

There is a considerable gap between awareness and understanding of use among our respondents on what makes quality time more efficacious. For instance, the almost all our respondents had stated that they were willing to plan activities to spend quality time together with their children.

Additionally, several respondents admitted that they would get annoyed when their time with their children is taken away. This suggests that Malay-Muslim fathers harbour the desire to schedule activities with their children, showing us their awareness of the importance of spending quality time with their progenies. This assumption is based on the hypothesis that should they be given the opportunity to do so, Malay-Muslim fathers will proactively choose to plan out and spend the available time productively with their children.

However, when asked if they would let their children do whatever they want if left alone together, many fathers agreed that they would.

"We could be doing very random stuff from just going to the supermarket, going to the malls, letting them play by the park, or meet up with their close friends for playdates and sometimes to visit their grandparents, and their cousins. So, it's more of their own free time." (39, Diploma holder)

This suggests that although fathers wished for more time to spend with their children, they might not be acquainted with ways to productively use such opportunities when they arise.

An inverse relationship can be attributed to the lack of parenting knowledge among these fathers, specifically about the ways to productively structure activities with their children. Therefore, this lack of awareness based on a perfunctory definition of quality time could be perceived as a "blindspot" among respondents.

Apart from visiting relatives during Hari Raya, the respondent below, for example, remembers quality time spent with his children only as the moments when they watched TV together.

> "Now I only spend quality time with my wife (laughter). My children, I think… like I said last time, when we were watching TV, we were watching good shows together, and everything. Or when we went visiting Hari Raya or certain occasions [together]." (60, unspecified education level)

6.4 Physical Constraints Affecting Quality Time

Generally, the study reveals that a strict adherence to work commitments is a main priority established by our respondents. Ensuring the family's financial well-being is a Malay-Muslim father's focal consideration, with overall financial health and stability being identified as his primary responsibility. As mentioned, this belief appears rooted in Malay ethnic tradition and Islamic doctrine. However, this conviction comes at the expense of other proactive parental considerations to child-rearing practices.

> "I'm the... so called the breadwinner for my own family. So the financial security has to be there, that comes as number one...if I can get a job, where it pays me handsomely, at a much lesser time, it will improve significantly on the rating on my satisfaction being a good father." (39, Diploma holder)

The importance of financial security is evident among the respondents. It was commonly reported among our respondents that they would get annoyed should they lack the finances to spend on their children.

This suggests that there are different thresholds of financial comfort among respondents from different income levels. Specifically, financial deficits experienced by fathers from a lower-income group means a greater strain on the survival of the family. These fathers then get annoyed as they may not be able to think of alternative ways to spend quality time with their children to compensate for their lack of financial capacity.

> "Because that one [financial well-being] is my responsibility, ah.... *nanti apa-apa* ("if there is anything lacking"), I [get] blamed for it, ah." (24, Nitec holder)

6.5 Strained Kinship Relations

For some fathers, obstacles to effective parenting come in the form of work commitments intruding on their time with their children. In the case of several divorcee fathers that were interviewed, the situation was made worse as it intersects with their post-divorce childcare arrangements. According to one such father, his ability to be an involved parent was further constrained by his ex-wife who constantly challenges his authority and custodial rights over his children. Similarly, another divorcee father spoke of being obstructed due to his limited custodial rights after his divorce. He bemoaned the fact that he had little choice but to make do with his current circumstance. While both respondents fall into the *time-available planning* category, their conception of quality time appears unstructured and entirely dependent on the

free time available to them and their children due to their extenuating circumstances. The excerpt below tells of a father who was unable to spend time with his child even during the days where he gets custody.

> ".... sometimes it's urgent. My boss calls me so I have to go…. And I mean, I don't see him every time… so when he sleeps, I must be beside him." (29, Nitec holder)

6.6 Situational Response Affecting Quality Time

While Section 3.2 showed how fathers were able to reap long-term childcaring benefits as a result of their kinship with their extended family, our data show that there are also fathers who have exhibited parenting resourcefulness despite lacking the advantage of having social networks. Such fathers optimise time spent with their children by engaging in activities that overcome the need for physical presence. This was achieved, for instance, by leveraging the use of technology, as in the case of a father who video-chats with his children on a nightly basis whenever he has to travel overseas for work. In fact, some fathers went to the extent of arranging for specific activities designed to cater to the interests and well-being of each child. Most respondents also consider their offspring's age and gender when putting into practice a more effective strategy to ensure impactful interactions.

> "For my eldest [boy]… I'm playing *Fortnite* (an online game) with him. For my daughter… we go *makan* (dine) together. Just the two of us. For my youngest boy (slight chuckle)… we go shopping together... I like to see them have fun, lah…. I bring them go playground, theme parks, go holiday.... Quality time [together] means [positive] experience.... Like that time when I brought them to see *korban* (sacrificial ceremony as part of the Hari Raya Haji celebrations where livestock is slaughtered and the meat distributed to the needy).... It's a life-learning experience." (37, Graduate)

As exemplified in the response above, apart from specific "alone time" with each child, quality time is also centred on the respondent sharing life-lessons with his children. Apart from accommodating the interest of each child, he gave the example of how he would nurture the development of his children's ability to learn and understand the concept of sacrifice by exposing them to the *korban* ceremony. This, he felt, added to their quality time spent together.

However, while we can see a relatively strong correlation between a father's level of personal knowledge of child development and the extent of his motivation in scheduling his other activities so as to spend time with them, this does not necessarily align with expectations of fathers with higher educational achievements. This is because the data reflect that the inclinations of fathers belonging to the same educational category may still differ due to variables such as age and their current stage of career progression.

A graduate father, for instance, admitted that for a time, he gave less priority towards nurturing his child. Though he was torn in wanting to spend quality time with him, he felt that he needed to juggle this with his many other responsibilities.

> "I was studying while doing Grab (driving a private hire vehicle), insurance, and tuition. I want to provide for my family and earn money. There was a point I felt I didn't know how to [take care of my child] because I was handling him, I was handling Grab, I was handling my FYP (final year project), I was doing insurance and tuition. When I look back, I only had like four hours of sleep every day… for three months." (25, Graduate)

For this respondent, any desire to put aside quality time to spend with his child was pushed to the periphery as his priorities became mainly concerned with attempts at furthering his career.

While individuals such as the above two fathers have attained the same level of higher education, the different responses between the two suggest that quality time takes a secondary role when placed against the backdrop of socio-economic aspirations. The importance of securing a brighter future for themselves and subsequently their family and positioning it above all other priorities has inherently shaped their perceptions of fatherly duties. Unfortunately for some, this aspiration comes at the expense of missing out on their young children's development.

6.7 Adapted Fathering Practices to Mitigate the Lack of Time

Our respondents report active forms of negotiation to make more effective their fathering practices especially in wanting to mitigate the physical constraints arising from a lack of time. Such acts of negotiation are evident in their engagement with their children. These measures were shaped by their subjective understanding of what quality time should be like.
To overcome their constraints brought about by their lack of time, our respondents gave two thematically distinct suggestions. First is the use of technology as a medium to increase quality time. Second, our respondents make physical sacrifices even though these may have detrimental effects on their personal mental and physical well-being.

Technological advancement has allowed for enhanced communication and opportunities for entertainment. Online games and tools for video communication are widely available. As a result, fathers have tapped on these platforms to manoeuvre around their long periods of work. This was emphasised by a father who relied on the use of video calls, as he frequently travels overseas for work before the COVID-19 pandemic:

> "Yea I'm always traveling...Monday to Friday... Yes, so every night lah without fail I will do (it)." (38, Graduate)

To our respondents, technology seems essential to maintain a connection with their children to compensate for the lack of physical presence in their children's daily lives. This suggests that these fathers have adapted their parenting style in order to have a more positive and sustainable impact on their children. Our respondents leverage on technology to bond and create quality time with their children. For example, they capitalise on online platforms to interact with them. Some respondents take up a character in MMORP games in the cyber world to better diversify the range of activities they can partake with their children.

> "*Nak main* [physical] *game… tapi kita sebagai parents pulak sibuk. Kita cakap 'tak boleh la. Ayah kerja penat balik nak tidur.' Tapi bila saya fikir balik… takpe, saya cuba luahkan masa saya main game dengan dorang. Saya try lah game zaman budak*

sekarang. Main game [online] *tembak-tembak. Saya pun tak reti sangat... [tapi] saya cuba ikutkan…. Jadi diorang cuba rapat dengan kita. Jadi dorang fikir balik, 'Eh best lah, ayah! Boleh main gini.'"* ["I was too tired to play physical games with the children after work. But I had a rethink.... So, I played online shooting (MMORP) games with them. I didn't really understand how to play it but I just followed…. It ended with them thinking, 'My dad is the best! He can play these games with me.'"] (32, Primary school education)

Despite the respondent acknowledging his lack of knowledge and experience with online gaming, the effort to participate in these activities showed his adaptable approach to cater to the interests of his children. Arguably, while the quality of the time spent may not be cognitively productive, it was aligned with his intentions to have shared bonding time together.

Furthermore, to mitigate the lack of time to bond with their children, other respondents made personal sacrifices to their personal time and physical well-being. They put in additional effort to reschedule their life around the needs of their family. Upon deeper analysis, other variables such as their nature of work and level of responsibility also determined their ability to manage their time.

Below is a response from a father who worked as a full-time private hire vehicle driver:

"*Saya buat [kerja] sampai pagi. [Bila sampai rumah….] Pagi tu dorang nak pergi sekolah…. Jadi saya ambil dorang terus satu kali hantar.... Saya tak boleh tidur kan? Saya scroll-scroll handphone…[supaya tak ngantuk]…. Itulah hari-hari saya buat.*" ["I will work till early morning. I will then send them to school. To stave off sleepiness, I will scroll my handphone. This is what I do everyday."] (32, Primary school education)

A father with more flexible working hours is more likely to be more involved in childcaring. In this case, the above respondent's work as a Grab driver gives him the flexibility to arrange his work shifts around his family's schedule. By working at night and sacrificing his sleep, he was able to be physically present during the waking hours of his children's life. He was able to foster a positive father-child relationship.

Time and finances are significant pressure points for our respondents, regardless of their educational level and income bracket. Fathering practices converge towards the ability to balance the gap between their involvement in childcaring and their responsibility as a family breadwinner. To examine the impact of this issue at the national level, however, more studies must be done to observe if a similar pattern exists among fathers from the other ethnicities as well.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

At the end of each interview, the fathers were prompted to offer suggestions for ways to alleviate the highlighted issues that hindered their parental practice. These were consolidated into the following two recommendations.

7.1 Improving Information Dissemination

Solutions proffered include the increase of online sources on parenting knowledge. Alternative online channels and platforms should also be provided to improve access for resource communities to expand their social networks. Other respondents added that such resources should not only be catered to those who are religiously inclined, but also to parents who are less religiously oriented but seek know-how that is more universal in its application to their daily fathering routine. An example would be suggestions on father-friendly childhood entertainment activities.

It was also suggested that animation videos broadcasted on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok could be used to encourage the spread of parenting information.

While there were existing workshops and talks on parenting, another suggestion was to offer venues that appear more approachable, to a more diverse crowd of fathers.

> "To share it with [more] people, because if I were to say we can just share this on Facebook or social media, not everybody is IT-literate, ah…. So to strike a proper balance between the lower-end people [sic]…. I would say that you need to reach out to these people, maybe through [more] groundwork. So if these organisations or these people have enough manpower, they should actually strike a lot of conversations with people on the ground. From the mosque, from the markets, from the coffee shops." (35, Graduate)

In the excerpt above, our respondent suggested using non-typical approaches, such as more casual, interactive methods of communication that occur at non-conventional venues for greater outreach to impact a wider pool of recipients. Parents of specific backgrounds may feel less threatened when they are in more neutral and organic spaces and would thus be more likely to attend such events.

However, we should be discerning of the online content available, specifically its suitability in the Singaporean cultural context. For instance, certain religious ideas traced to foreign religious scholars via YouTube were deemed inappropriate as it was purported to incite religious disharmony in Singapore's multi-cultural society. Some of such scholars were subsequently banned from entering the country to conduct live events (Mokhtar, 2017).

7.2 Expanding Outreach

Our respondents suggested recommendations to improve access to fathering knowledge and expanding the outreach of such materials.

First, some suggestions proposed educating the wives of our respondents as "change agents" to inform their husbands of various activities that promote father-child bonding. Here, the wives perform the function of providing incentives to their husbands to be more involved fathers in the lives of their children.

Second, a few fathers brought up the idea of interactive social media, specifically ones that capitalise on immersive experiences. While there may be available resources focusing on fathering knowledge, these may not be widely known due to a lack of marketing, promotional or branding strategies. There may be a need to relook the ways in which organisations cater to Malay-Muslim fathers, to plan their outreach to the public. For example, our respondents suggested using catchy advertisements or bite-sized videos on parenting knowledge on Instagram. Furthermore, interested stakeholders could host anonymous Q&A segments on their Instagram stories to feature a network of experts. These sites could even serve to direct parents to professional platforms for further assistance, should they request it.

Lastly, in their interviews, the respondents also mentioned a few role models that they looked up to. This leads to another way to sustain and ensure the validity of the many sources of fathering information. Basically, an initiative could be to introduce and highlight a pool of credible role models from various walks of life such as *asatizah* and Malay-Muslim influencers to promote such fathering information sites. Interested stakeholders could feature stories of exemplary fathers, catered to various groups of fathers from different income brackets. As suggested by some of the respondents, these websites can also tap the benefits of online life-sharing approaches, such as personal stories posted on Instagram and Facebook Live. A recent series of short and economically produced videos on IGTV focusing on Malay horror stories is a structure worth emulating.

Chapter 8: Coda

This project was put on hold for a period of four months due to safe-distancing protocols put in place during the initial COVID-19 outbreak. Only when the safety protocols were eased were we able to continue with physical interactions required for data collection. When some respondents requested that meet-ups for their interview sessions be conducted online, we acceded and arranged for Zoom interviews. However, it has to be stated that such online interactions, albeit still relevant, are nevertheless has its limitations as the respondents' non-verbal gestures or their immediate surroundings may not be comprehensively "read" by the interviewer. These additional insights would have provided useful information to the field researcher, which may then be useful to the study.

8.1 Essential Questions

Based on the responses provided by individuals who had participated in this study, the following essential questions were further gathered as a means of ascertaining possible implications relating to the findings:

1. How can fathers be made to be more reflexive in their practice of Islam?
2. Considering the role of mothers: What can they do to encourage fathers to be more involved in the parenting process?

3. How do we enhance Malay-Muslim fathers' social networks and in the process raise the social capital of the family?
4. How do we reshape the ideology of gender roles among fathers?
5. How do we teach fathers to devise effective communication strategies with their children and their co-caregivers?
6. How can Malay-Muslim fathers improve their access to appropriate information to enhance their fathering skills?
7. If work gets in the way, how can fathers leverage "fun" technology to overcome this challenge? E.g., use of video chat, MMORP, Pokémon Go, etc.

8.2 Moving Forward

This study has identified several socio-cultural challenges that influence the way Singaporean Malay-Muslim fathers carry out their parenting duties. 70 Malay-Muslim respondents from various socio-economic backgrounds had participated in face-to-face in-depth interviews for this research. The study found that Islam provides Malay-Muslim fathers with a framework on how to be effective parents. However, they articulated different levels of understanding on how this is to be managed. It was also revealed that social networks and relationships provide support and information that guide Malay-Muslim fathers in carrying out their parental duties. What surfaces is the importance of the quality of these interactions. Finally, Malay-Muslim fathers saw value in spending quality time with their children. Unfortunately, many were unaware of what constitutes quality time with their loved ones and thus did not seek knowledge on how to spend productive moments with their children when the opportunity arises.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will be shared to all stakeholders interested in creating positive growth for Malay-Muslim fathers in the country. The benefit will then not only be for Malay families but for Singapore's larger society and the nation as a whole.

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