

BRIEF

The Best Practices for Engaging Men and fathers in Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Kind of interventions for fathers in nurturing care
- Effectiveness of Implementation and evaluation of parenting programs
- Effectiveness of programs for husbands' care work and unpaid housework

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Considering the time, flexibility, and activities that satisfy needs.
- Develop a multidimensional policy.

OVERVIEW

How we think about and understand fathering has changed. Active 'fathering' is now an accepted role for men at home, and fathers are visible outside the school gates, in parks and playgrounds, and in the streets and shopping centers. Fathers' involvement in childcare increased. Engaging men to be more active, and involving fathers is key to advancing gender equality goals, positive communication, supportive guidance, etc., and improving the lives of families. This brief provides a synopsis of a few Programs offered especially for men/fathers to improve Early Childhood Development (ECD) and parental collaboration. It will show how programs are designed to promote active, involved parenting, parenting skills, fathers' engagement in caregiving, parent-child interaction and relationship quality, and violence reduction; as well as key evaluation findings, implementation challenges, lessons learned, and considerations for future adaptations.



1. Fathers in Nurturing Care

In Lebanon as partners of UN agencies or MoSA (Ministry of Social Affairs), international and national NGOs implement programs that vary in terms of practices. They target different publics (Youth, fathers, religious leaders, men caregivers, men heads of household, Media, community leaders, academic institutions, authorities, health providers, parents, governmental institutions, and relatives).

As part of the topics included in the “men and boys’ engagement” programs, organizations in Lebanon work on



Some organizations engage men and/or boys/youth in the frame of a community resilience program, or women’s empowerment programs, while others engage men and/or boys/youth to directly promote gender equality in the community or in a specific institution or to prevent violence from happening or from repeating.

Men are usually seen as agents of change and the peer-to-peer approach is sometimes promoted to raise awareness of some negative aspects of masculinity within the community. Humanitarian organizations tend to integrate the engagement of men and boys into their programs, while development agencies tend to engage men at the community and societal level to create groups against VAWG. The duration of the projects is therefore different and depends mostly on funding.



2. Implementation of Parenting Programs

It is well known that parenting programs work with partners around the world to address and shift norms, as well as policies and systems that inhibit equality and that underpin many aspects of gender inequality, including absent fatherhood, intimate partner violence, corporal punishment, and women's unequal burden of unpaid care work. Although MENA countries have different characteristics and contexts differ on institutional, financial, and technical levels, they have shared a similar outlook on fathers' "usual" gendered roles in society.

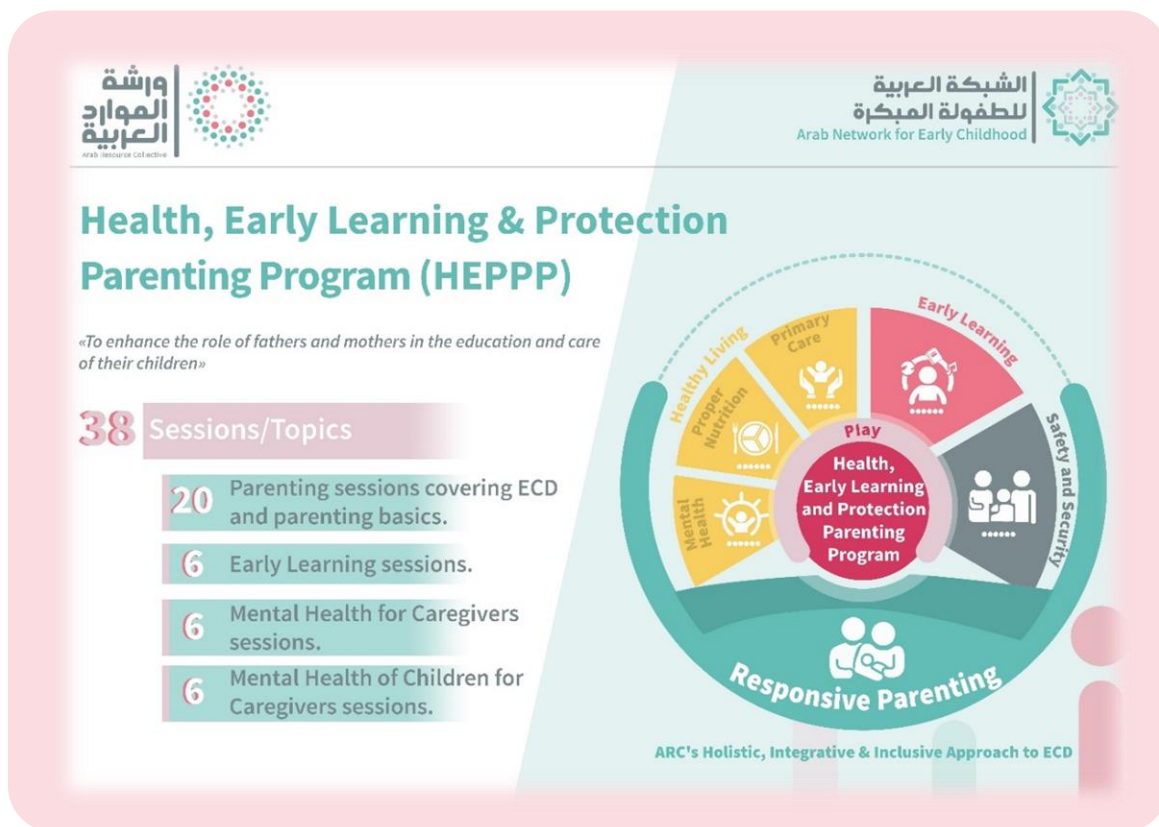
To support the global efforts of shifting norms as well as policies in Lebanon, **Equimundo and ABAAD (2017) adapted Program P** to include a focus on early childhood development (ECD) and piloted with Lebanese and Syrian couples with young children; ultimately, it aimed to prevent men's violence against women and achieve family well-being and gender equality for Lebanese and Syrian families through a series of evidence-based, hands-on sessions with men and their partners.¹

The recent evaluation (January 2020) of the evidence-based parenting program of P-ECD in Lebanon found that hands-on, discussion sessions with parents can lead to reductions in corporal punishment, men's increased involvement at home, and improvements in couple communication. Lebanese are eager to work together with their partners to learn positive parenting techniques, to talk about manhood, emotions, relationships, and violence, and to become more engaged and supportive fathers and husbands. Furthermore, it found a significant decline in the use of harsh physical discipline with children, increases in men's active participation in both housework and caregiving tasks, and increases in communication within the couple about their own and their partner's concerns and feelings.²

A father is the single most important model for how a child will father in the future. Fathers often consider part of their role to be "family protectors." From this belief, A holistic, integrated, and inclusive approach covering health, nutrition, early learning, social welfare, and physical protection program was developed by Arab Research Collective (ARC). This approach "**Health, Early Learning, Protection, Parenting Program**" (HEPPP) is a tool developed by a team of early childhood experts, academics, and practitioners from Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon. Its aim was to empower the role of parents and caregivers in the care and nurturing of their children. In addition, it is used in sessions with both mothers and fathers together and covers many topics from pregnancy up to eight years. The sessions provide a framework of concepts, skills, and exercises to enhance parents' knowledge about the importance of the early years; nurture a holistic and inclusive approach towards raising children; encourage respect for children's diverse potential, skills, and pace of development; develop good practice in health, nutrition, early learning, and risk management; promote positive caregiving practices, minimize stress and avoid violence; improve the community's impact on children's health, education, and safety; and build parents' capacity to become role

models and support other parents. The evaluation of the program found a clear impact on participants' knowledge, practices, and attitudes in most topics, and identified various ways to improve it.

In 2020, the guide was updated and digitized into a self-taught and interactive course. It currently has 38 sessions encompassing the science of ECD, communication, behavioural topics, safety and health, equality and inclusion, education, early learning, mental health for caregivers, and children's mental health. Twenty sessions are chosen based on the needs of the community and implemented in each round. This course is found on Urjouha (Swing in Arabic), ARC's parenting website. The website is an online platform developed to accompany caregivers on their journey with girls and boys, from pregnancy until the age of 8 years.



To improve parents' well-being, parenting stress levels, parenting behavior, and discipline strategies a designed positive parenting intervention was implemented in three refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. Results revealed that parents' mental health and well-being improved and the dysfunctional interactions with the children as well as the perceived difficulties and conduct problems in the children aged 3 to 6 years were also reduced significantly.³ Another study conducted between 2019 and 2021 compared between the Face-to-face and Online modalities of the HEPPP after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The research chapter will be published in the book on ECD and the pandemic by the University of Virginia in the second half



of 2023. The online intervention conducted by mentors had the highest participation and completion rates and was the most effective in improving the parents' well-being (ie. improvement in their mood). It also significantly improved their parenting stress index. The online intervention also had a significant positive effect on the parents' negative disciplinary practices with their children. However, the face-to-face versions, supported by the same master trainers as the online version, had an even more positive effect on reducing stress and improving parents' psychosocial well-being. The face-to-face version also allowed parents to practice with mentors and other parents, ways they could interact and play with their children. To retain this effect, ARC is testing in 2023 a hybrid modality in which parents take the 20 sessions online yet come and meet with their mentors every 5 sessions.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) offered in places as disparate as Nigeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan a program called **Families Make Difference (FMD)**. The program was created for caregivers of children under five and consists of ten sessions that teach about brain development, empathy, positive communication, positive discipline, supportive guidance, routines, and sessions on parental stress. In the first year of implementation, parents were reluctant to join the program of competing demands on their time, distrust of program facilitators, and skeptic that the program could help them. A couple of years later, the program had a waiting list.⁴

While interventions are mostly targeted towards the participants themselves, it is important to keep in mind the training and building on capacities of the Programmes' developers and implementors. Coordinators, trainers, and frontliners are often from the community that they are addressing and are also subject to this stigma and perspectives on roles. They need interventions and strengthening to address these topics effectively and exert change and transformation in society starting with the short term and looking unto sustainability and scalability.

In the March 2023 Regional Meeting of UNICEF and partners in the MENA Region (of which International Step by Step Association -ISSA-, the Arab Network for Early Childhood -ANECD-, Plan International Jordan, Kafa Lebanon, National Council for Family Affairs Jordan -NCFA-, Social Emotional Ethical Compassion Wellness -SEEC-, and UNICEF Country offices) in Jordan, professionals discussed the challenges faced in involving and engaging fathers and males and how they are related to

1. Males perspectives on these topics,
2. Their understanding of the roles,
3. Their resistance in the face of the new approach,
4. the topics that might be uninteresting to fathers (or rather the approach that is employed),
5. The challenges related to their working hours and schedules,
6. As well as their fear of societal judgment and pressure for their engagement in these programs.



In the past years, UNICEF strengthened its commitment to gender equality by investing in integrating gender across all programming sectors, targeting the well-being and empowerment of adolescent girls, and strengthening institutional strategies and systems.⁵

With the challenges faced in mind, **UNICEF MENARO and ISSA developed in 2022 a resource package on Gender Transformative Parenting (GTP)** addressed specifically to frontline workers and programme developers and implementors. The package aims at increasing awareness of the GTP methods and their impacts, preparing and supporting the frontliners to respond and address the challenges related to gender topics, and promoting gender equity and equality in their activities.⁶ The guide believes that parenting is a preventive tool and that through GTP programmes, it is possible to build partnerships with the caregivers and enhance the equal rights for both mothers and fathers to enjoy parenthood. The resource package is designed flexibly, allowing users to adapt it to their needs and use it in different ways.

UNICEF Lebanon team developed a Parenting Curriculum for Parents of Children with Disabilities based on a comprehensive desk review conducted in 2021 of existing curricula, Key Informant Interviews and FGDs with key stakeholders. The curriculum provides information for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities on how to advocate and promote children's rights, understand and enhance their development through early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence, use positive approaches to help children with disabilities learn appropriate behaviours, to encourage independent life skills, to protect them from violence and for parents/caregivers to understand and manage their own emotions related to raising children with disabilities.⁷

Practitioners who have successfully engaged dads in programming say planning is key, such as knowing fathers' schedules and what they like to do with their kids. They also recommend having dads run activities and implementing programming that is responsive to dads' needs and interests.⁸

More systemic changes may also yield positive outcomes. For example, some home-visiting programs that typically target pregnant women and mothers of young children in at-risk families are now engaging fathers as well as mothers. Promising practices include providing home visitors with father-specific information and having separate visits for mothers and fathers, with male home visitors serving as mentors.⁹

Evidence in programs implemented by different parties highlighted the importance of involving influencers such as leaders within the community, barbers (UNICEF Tunisia), cafe owners (UNICEF Egypt), other fathers and male trainers (ARC in Lebanon and Jordan). This method is very beneficial to appeal to men, reaching them in their own interest areas, and keeping them engaged and motivated.



3. Care Work and Unpaid Housework

The issue of unpaid work requires an intersectional analysis as it affects - and is affected by - a large range of variables and factors entrenched within socio-cultural patterns, economic trends, and policies. In fact, studies on unpaid work cover a large range of perspectives and assumptions and follow diverse analytical schemes and frameworks. A lot of research also tackles unpaid work indirectly as a result or a component to be addressed within a wider economic or social justice scope.

In their report about the state of the world's fathers, Promundo 2019, called for full equality between women and men in the workplace and in the home. The unpaid care work must be valued as much as paid work and shared equally between men and women. Upon looking at the care work in MENA region and specifically in Lebanon and Jordan the researchers noticed that women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to ten times as much – on unpaid care and domestic work.¹⁰

In 2020, Oxfam commissioned a study on unpaid care work in Jordan. The purpose of the study was to better understand what care work women and men do, how it is distributed, and how people think about it. The study found that women perform most care work activities, and that gender norms compound an unequal redistribution of unpaid care.

In a Joint Statement by the ILO and UN Women on the Global Day of Action for Care in Lebanon in October 2022 the conveners emphasized on the notion that if governments want to care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work. They call on transformative action in the policy areas of care, macroeconomics, social protection, labor and equality, migration, and environment. They recommend the need to

1. Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work;
2. Provide decent work for caregivers; and
3. Ensure representation, social dialogue, and collective bargaining of care workers.

The **ILO has adapted the “GET Ahead”** 11 materials and started implementing training activities on women's entrepreneurship development linking three Arab countries in crisis: Iraq, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Lebanon. Activities in Lebanon focus on war-affected areas in the South and the Nahr El-Bared Palestinian camp. In March 2008, a training-of-trainers workshop was held in Amman using the adapted “GET Ahead” approach. The training has created a pool of trainers familiar with ILO materials on enterprise development for women in the context of crisis.

The MENA region has rather a shortage of government policies that respond to the care needs of society. This is due to the lack of evidence-based policy-making mechanisms and challenges in financing service delivery. ¹² The case differs for every MENA country, where country-specific contexts are highly driven by government structures, political dynamics, and aspects of economic instability and conflict. ¹³

That sheds a bigger light on the role of systems and governments in mainstreaming male engagement in not only responsive programs but also preventive ones. Professionals in the UNICEF and partners MENA March 2023 meeting elaborated on the role of policies and labour laws in gatekeeping fathers and preventing them from being more engaged (no or short paternal leave in MENA region for example), family planning programs (starting not only with SRH -sexual reproductive health- and parenting program, but couple focused programs), and the role of media and targeted messaging to boys, fathers, and males.





4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Involving men and boys in such programs can take time. Therefore, one should consider time as **a positive factor to build trust** and ensure the continuity of participation, even if the community is resistant at first. Program implementation should also allow flexibility and participation of the targeted group. It is imperative to be aware and respectful of each area/context & common features' specificity and adapt activities according to men's and boys' needs.

Unpaid care has its roots in the discriminatory social norms that judge care as a woman's responsibility. This view has various repercussions on women, most notably, it hinders women's economic empowerment. To address these issues, we must develop a multidimensional policy centered around recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work, tackling discriminatory social norms through the educational sector and the media, increasing the government's investment in time-saving infrastructure, and the ratification of non-transferable parental leave policies.





5. End Notes

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