

# Paternal Involvement of Singaporean Fathers Within Six Months Postpartum: A Descriptive Qualitative Study

**Dr Shefaly Shorey, PhD, RN, RM**

*Assistant Professor,*

**Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies (ALCNS),  
National University of Singapore**

**Email: [nurssh@nus.edu.sg](mailto:nurssh@nus.edu.sg)**

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# Overview

- **Background**
- **Methods**
- **Results**
- **Discussion**
- **Implications**

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# Introduction

- Growing **expectation** of involved fatherhood
- Expectation of the paternal role shifted from provider's role to a role no different than that of the maternal role
- Men's **transition to fatherhood** can be:
  - Unrewarding
  - Stressful
  - Exhausting (for first-time fathers)
- Fathers are expected to be involved in their family and, also assume the provider's role
- As a result, men **struggle** during the transition to meet the expectations of this new fatherhood

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# Introduction

- This struggle may affect the quality of **paternal involvement** with their infants
  - In recent years, research has shown the role of paternal involvement on young **children's development**
  - Infants of fathers with higher involvement are more sociable and have **better cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes**
  - Paternal non-involvement at 3 months postpartum was found to be associated with child **behavioural problems** in 1 year old children

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# Purpose of The Study

**To explore paternal experiences, expectations, needs and the factors influencing paternal involvement within six months postpartum**

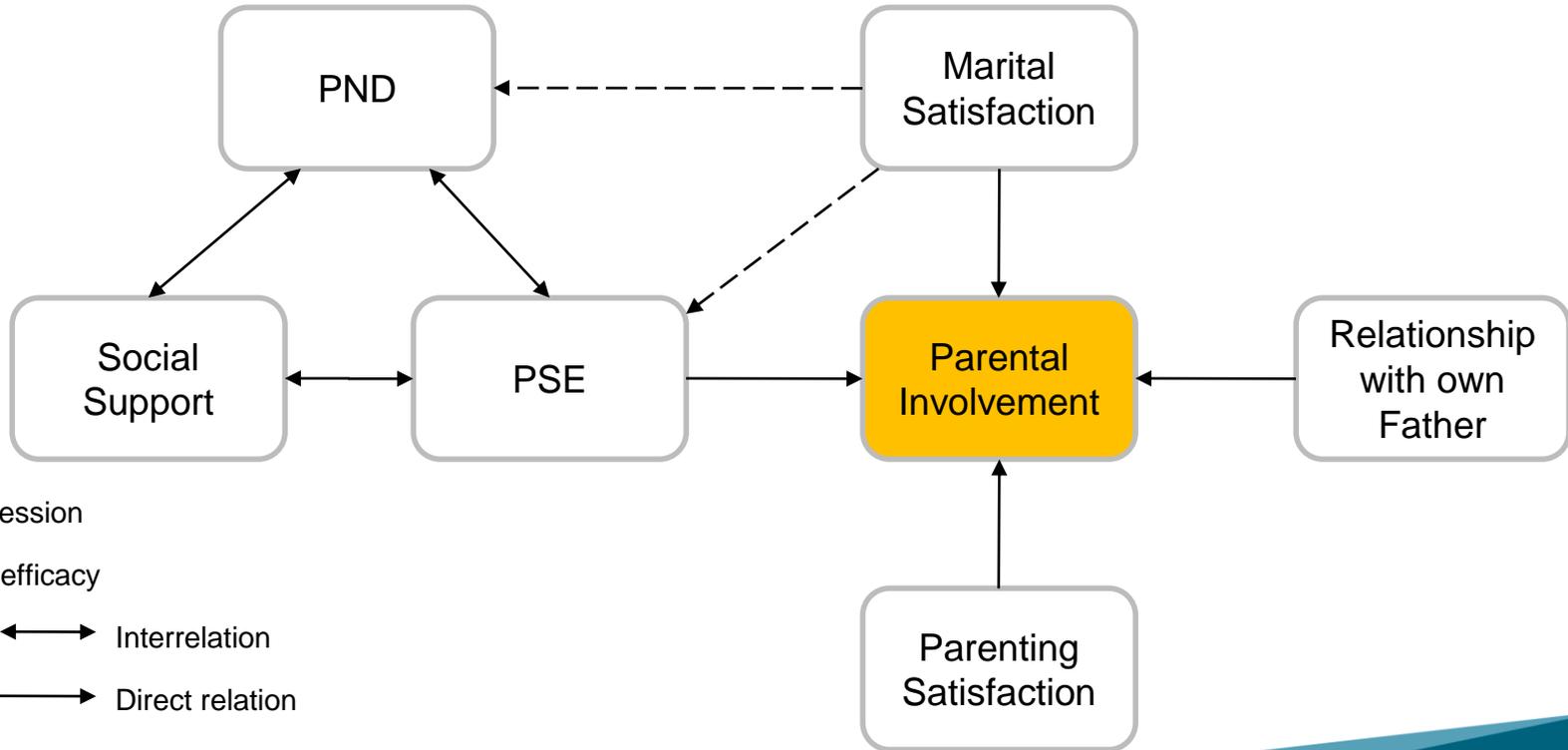
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# Conceptual Framework



## Legends

PND: Postnatal depression

PSE: Parenting Self-efficacy

Double sided arrow  $\longleftrightarrow$  Interrelation

Single sided Arrow  $\longrightarrow$  Direct relation

Dotted line Arrow  $- - - \longrightarrow$  Indirect relation

# Study Design

- **Longitudinal mixed method two-phased study design**

## Phase-I

- Quantitative surveys regarding paternal outcomes including parenting self-efficacy, paternal involvement etc.

## Phase-II

- Qualitative interviews addressing the critical issues from Phase-I results
- To further explore paternal experiences and needs pertaining to their involvement in childcare

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# Outcome Measures and Instruments

- **Parenting Self-efficacy**
- **Perceived social support for parenting**
- **Postnatal Depression**
- **Paternal Involvement**
- **Parenting Satisfaction**
- **The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)**
- **Family of Origin Questionnaire (FOQ)**
- **Beliefs Concerning the Parental Role Scale (BCPR).**
- **Sociodemographic data sheet**

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# Methods: Study Design/Sampling

Descriptive Qualitative Design was used

Purposive sampling was used to recruit fathers of different ethnicities

Participants were recruited from a public hospital in Singapore

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# Methods: Sampling

## Inclusion criteria:

- $\geq$  Age 21
- Fathers (First-time and experienced) from different ethnicities
  - Chinese
  - Malay
  - Indian
- Either Singapore citizen or Singapore Permanent Resident
- Reside in Singapore for the 6 months after the birth of their child
- Partners given birth to infants who were born healthy at or after 37 weeks of gestation

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# Interview Guide

- **Semi-structured interview**
- **Fathers were approached and invited to participate in a face-to-face interview on the day of their wife's discharge from the hospital**
- **Consent for audio-recording the interview was obtained prior to commencement**
- **Field notes taken during the face-to-face interviews were used to supplement the transcripts**

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# Methods: Ethical Consideration

- **Ethics approval was obtained from National Health Group Domain Specific Review Board**
- **Researchers ensured that the ethic standards were adhere to during and after data collection**
- **Consent was obtained before data collection**
- **Confidentiality was maintained**
- **Voluntary participation**

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# Rigour

- **Credibility** – Ongoing, self-critical stance on researcher’s preconceptions, subjectivity, actions, feelings, and conflicts experienced throughout the research process
- **Dependability** – Audit trail of relevant documents used over the course of data collection and analysis are kept, including the interview guide, field notes, audio-recordings, interview transcripts and how coding, subthemes and themes are derived. Investigator triangulation was achieved
- **Transferability** – Clear presentation of findings
- **Confirmability** – By maintaining researchers’ objectivity, audit trail, and by establishing credibility, dependability and transferability
- **Authenticity** – Verbatim quotes will be provided

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# Findings (Qualitative Study)

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# Results: Demographic

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
• Chinese	31	62.0
• Malay	16	32.0
• Indian	3	6.0
<b>Education</b>		
• Secondary School	3	6.0
• Post-secondary	8	16.0
• Diploma	10	20.0
• Bachelor's degree	28	56.0
• Post-graduate degree	1	2.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
• Self-employed	6	12.0
• Full-time	42	84.0
• Part-time	1	2.0
• Unemployed	1	2.0

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<b>Monthly household income (SGD)</b>		
• \$1,000 - \$2,999	7	14.0
• \$3,000 - \$5,999	12	24.0
• \$6,000 - \$9,999	20	40.0
• > \$10,000	11	22.0
<b>Availability of support</b>		
• Yes	44	88.0
• No	6	12.0
<b>First-time father?</b>		
• Yes	34	68.0
• No	16	32.0
<b>Attended antenatal classes?</b>		
• Yes	19	38.0
• No	31	62.0

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# Results: Themes

Themes	Subthemes
Support system of father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sources of support</li><li>• Types of support</li><li>• Experiences with support received</li></ul>
Paternal involvement in childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prior experiences</li><li>• Motivation and hindrances to involvement</li><li>• Types of involvement</li></ul>
Challenges of fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stressful transition period</li><li>• Gaps between expectation and reality</li></ul>
Recommendations by fathers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures to facilitate paternal involvement</li><li>• Improvement for current antenatal classes</li><li>• Availability of information and guidance</li></ul>

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### Lived experiences of Asian fathers during the early postpartum period: Insights from qualitative inquiry

Shafaly Shoray, PhD, RN, RM (Assistant Professor) Lina Ang, B.Soc.Sc. (Hon) (Research Assistant), Father, C.L., Goh, PhD (Associate Professor)

PlumX Metrics

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2018.02.009> | CrossMark

Article Info

Abstract Full Text References

#### Highlights

- Fathers desired to be involved in the care of their infant.
- Factors inhibiting their participation in infant care were highlighted by fathers.
- First-time fathers found it challenging to cope with early weeks of postpartum.
- Experienced fathers faced the challenge of dealing with sibling jealousy.
- Necessary help is needed for both first-time and experienced fathers.

Abstract

# Theme 1: Support System of Fathers

## Sources of support

- All father received some support from healthcare practitioners
- For most fathers, support is mainly from spouse, parents, or parents-in-law
- A few fathers reported that no support was available for them after discharge from the hospital
- Domestic helper or confinement nanny

*“...we recently hired a domestic helper because we knew that there's a lot of cooking and cleaning involved, so that really helped in reducing the load...”*  
*(Participant 47)*

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# Theme 1: Support System of Fathers

## Types of support

- Fathers were the ones who supported their wives emotionally
- Instrumental help from healthcare practitioners, family member, confinement nannies, and domestic helper
- Informational support: Parents or parents-in-law
- Rarely receive any appraisal feedback from support system

*“...they (my parents) know what to buy, (like) what are the traditional Chinese medicine that you need to buy... they will tell you to buy the ‘Ruyi You’ (medicated oil) for the baby, and... what sort of herbs to buy... they will just come here and drop the supplies. Like they will come and drop like Mi Jiu (rice wine)... or the ‘Zhu Jiao Chu’ (vinegar pig trotters).” (Participant 29)*

# Theme 1: Support System of Fathers

## Experiences with support received

- Vary from positive to negative
- Help from parents or parents-in-law was beneficial
- Received conflicting advices as well

*“...sometimes the philosophy (is) a bit different. For example, my mother-in-law and I had a tension regarding breastfeeding. She didn't breastfeed in the past and pushed the same for my baby. So, I mean, I was quite insistent [on breastfeeding by my wife], to the extent of like quarrelling with her (my mother-in-law)....” (Participant 3)*

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# Theme 2: Paternal Involvement in Childcare

## Prior experiences

- Experienced fathers: more involved, more competent, and motivated
- Most fathers want to be more involved
- Model the good and change the bad of their own father's parenting style

*“...I am from a low income family, so that's why my dad needed to travel around so much domestically and internationally in the past. So, erm... while in here, I try as much as possible to stay in Singapore to handle my children... to be present.” (Participant 43)*

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# Theme 2: Paternal Involvement in Childcare

## Motivation and hindrances to involvement

- **Motivation:** believe that they should be involved in child care. Motivated from the interactions with their infant

*“Just holding her in my arms. Watching her drink. \*laugh\* Watching her make the sucking sound.” (Participant 24)*

- **Hindrances:** not by choice but by circumstances. Unable to interact when mothers are breastfeeding. Mothers assume fathers lack skills and techniques to do task safely.

*“Haven’t, she also don’t allow me (be)cause she, like, she don’t want me to \*pause\* handle, la... She’s scared I don’t know how to do... And because she’s, like, over-protective... I want to try, la, but my wife doesn’t allow me to.” (Participant 34)*

# Theme 2: Paternal Involvement in Childcare

## Type of involvement

- **Direct involvement:** diaper changing, putting infant to sleep
- **Indirect involvement:** household chores such as grocery shopping

*“...I’m side-lining most of the tasks So, uhm, she’s (my wife’s) more focused on the kids while I’m more focused on other things... You know, household chores... You know, groceries and everything.” (Participant 18)*

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# Theme 3: Challenges of Fatherhood

## Stressful transition period

- First-time father with no support faced stress and anxiety after hospital discharge
- Sleep was disturbed during the first few nights after discharge
- Considered not having a second child

*“...sometimes I feel, like, upset and disappointed? Because, uh, the baby frequently woke us up for milk? And (we) couldn’t get enough sleep, and sometimes even, even when we feed her enough milk, she still does not stop crying... the baby’s cry is kind of annoying?” (Participant 1)*

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# Theme 3: Challenges of Fatherhood

## Stressful transition period

- Experienced fathers had difficulties integrating their older children with the new youngest addition
- Older children displayed signs of jealousy and were more demanding for attention from their parents

*“...the first thing that I got home, the challenges is your first kid... she thinks that she will not get the attention anymore... so you will face a totally different character when she’s alone.” (Participant 17)*

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# Theme 3: Challenges of Fatherhood

## Gaps between expectations and reality

- **Expectations:** To do everything the mother could do, except for breastfeeding
- **Reality:** Work commitment, “not enough” paternity leave, and fear in handling fragile infant

*“I would say I was not as involved as I would like to be? Ya, but, uhm, then again, it’s all because of work commitments and schedules.” (Participant 18)*

*“...I see my mum do it. Then I think I’m a bit scared, uh... (be)cause the baby will struggle in reality, uh... My mum is so experienced, leh... so I don’t think I have the confidence... (be)cause it’s (the baby’s) quite fragile.” (Participant 26)*

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# Theme 4: Recommendations By Fathers

## Measures to facilitate paternal involvement

- Increase paternity leave
- Shared parental leave not beneficial as fathers hesitate to use it
- The need of educational programmes, especially for fathers to learn skills of infant care

*“...I guess it’s always important to have special programmes for us fathers so that we can provide relevant support to our wives during the confinement period... I guess, more important, lah.” (Participant 18)*

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# Theme 4: Recommendations By Fathers

## Improvement for current antenatal classes

- Current antenatal classes are only beneficial to certain extent
- Content of classes heavily focused on mothers' task
- Classes were not very hands-on and could not really apply what they had learnt on their infants
- Only had to deal with “dolls”

*“...yes, it's (the antenatal class is) helpful but it's not so-called practice because we just listen but we never practice, so after we deliver, we also need to learn about it... In total, it's quite good... Knowledge wise, but, uh, let's say, to improve the classes, there should be practice.” (Participant 48)*

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# Theme 4: Recommendations By Fathers

## Availability of information and guidance

- Lacking after discharge
- Fathers were reluctant to call the hotline as they were not aware if their concerns were serious enough
- Need information on common illnesses, signs and pictures of what is normal and abnormal, and a step-by-step guide on infant care
- Preferred to have information and guidance through online resources, which is free and easily available to them

*“...for first-timers who totally don't know anything, ah, I think it's quite tough, leh. One time you can see everything, I don't think you can learn everything... Provide a video \*laughs\*... educational videos or online materials so that you can always rewind and see.” (Participant 44)*

# Discussion

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# Discussion

- **Trajectory of paternal involvement didn't differ much in six months postpartum**
- **Abundant Instrumental support** (Glanz et al., 2008; Poh et al., 2014; Shan & Hawkins, 2014)
  - Major source: extended **family**, friends, **internet**
  - 1st week major source: confinement nannies and domestic helpers
  - Presence of support was beneficial
  - However, conflicting and unreliable advice can become a source of stressor
- **Fathers desired and expected themselves to be an involved father before the birth of their child** (Anderson, 1996; Goodman, 2005; Hall, 1995; Henderson et al., 1991; Kao & Long, 2004)
  - But faced many hindrances all the way till 6 months postpartum
  - In Singaporean context, men are not expected to be heavily involved in child care tasks

# Discussion

- **Mothers play an important role in either promoting or hindering paternal involvement in child care** (Jordan, 1990; Zvara et al., 2013)
  - Breastfeeding
  - Believe fathers lacked the skills and were generally not as competent
  - Paternal involvement was generally on other domestic tasks indirectly involved to infant care
- **Transition to fatherhood a challenging time for both first-time and experienced fathers**
  - Incessant crying from infants
  - Exhaustion from a lack of sleep
  - Work commitment
  - Lack of father role model
  - Mandatory two weeks paternity leave was not sufficient
  - Sibling rivalry
  - Own Emotional and physical needs
  - Lack of channel to share their feelings

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# Discussion

- **First-time fathers were afraid to handle their infants due to the lack of experience in infant care**
- **Experienced fathers faced challenges of assimilating their older children into accepting their new youngest addition**
- **Recommendations**
  - Focused educational programmes
  - Current antenatal classes too theoretical
  - Online resources
  - Information beyond first few weeks of infant needs
  - Coverage on Emotional and Physical needs
  - Social Awareness
  - More childcare leave
  - Confinement ladies

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# Discussion

## Predictors of paternal involvement at 6 months postpartum

- Parental self-efficacy
- Paternal involvement at infant's birth
- Paternal postnatal depression
- Working status of spouse at 6 months postpartum
- Wife's antenatal classes attendance

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH  
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH – QUANTITATIVE

WILEY

### Factors influencing paternal involvement during infancy: A prospective longitudinal study

Shetalay Shorey<sup>1</sup> | Lisa Ang<sup>2</sup> | Esther C.L. Goh<sup>2</sup> | Mihir Gandhi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Yong Lee Cancer for Young Adults, Yong Lee Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, National University Health System, Singapore

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Work, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, Singapore

<sup>3</sup>Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Singapore Clinical Research Institute, Singapore

**Handling Information:**  
This study was funded by the Ministry of Health and Family Development (MOH/FDF 2015-1). The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) also provided the research assistant at the hospital, methods, and results were used in their studies. Funding was results arising from the research project in the present publication is solely the property of the participant and author.

#### Abstract

**Aims:** To explore factors influencing paternal involvement at 6 months postpartum and to detail the trend of these factors over a period of 6 months.

**Background:** There is a dearth of studies on paternal involvement during infancy in the unique Asian context.

**Design:** A prospective four-time point longitudinal design was adopted.

**Methods:** A total of 202 participants were recruited from a local hospital from May 2016 – December 2017 using convenience sampling. Self-administered questionnaires were used for data collection. Data were statistically analyzed.

**Results:** Parenting self-efficacy at 6-month postpartum, paternal involvement, and paternal postnatal depression on the day of wife's hospital discharge, wife in paid work and wife's antenatal class attendance significantly influenced paternal involvement at 6 months postpartum. A sub-analysis of first-time and experienced fathers revealed that parenting self-efficacy at 6-month postpartum, paternal involvement on the day of wife's hospital discharge and wife in paid work were significant factors influencing paternal involvement for first-time fathers. Significant factors influencing paternal involvement for experienced fathers were paternal involvement on the day of wife's hospital discharge and wife's antenatal class attendance.

**Conclusion:** Fathers (first-time and experienced) who were involved during their infant's birth were also involved at 6-month postpartum. Healthcare professionals may encourage paternal involvement through teaching fathers infant care skills during the antenatal period, especially first-time fathers as they may be lacking in such skills, which may hinder their parenting satisfaction. Paternal involvement throughout the perinatal period can be reinforced by healthcare professionals to promote paternal involvement.

#### KEYWORDS

6-month postpartum, fathers, infant care, infants, parenting self-efficacy, paternal involvement

#### 1 | INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have identified factors that were associated with

Michael, & Wind, 2009; Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). However, these studies were conducted in Western contexts. Cultural values and ideologies influence fathering behaviours and shape the

# Implications

- **Educational classes (Both first-time and experienced fathers)**
- **Hands-on activities for antenatal classes (Real Babies)**
- **Involve fathers cover sensitive issues**
- **Internet-based programmes**
- **Social Awareness**
- **Leave**
- **Standardized services for confinement nannies**

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# Summary

- Fathers **desired to be an involved** father but faced many challenges
- First-time fathers and experienced fathers have their own **unique challenges**
- **Father-inclusive educational interventions** to be designed and implemented across the perinatal period to foster behavioural change and for fathers to have higher levels of parenting satisfaction in the Asian context
- **Social awareness** on fathers' involvement

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