

# **Formative Study on Fathers' Engagement Model (Age 0-2) in the Camp**

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**Research Team**

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## Background

Since the beginning of the Rohingya influx, the emergence of an entirely new community facing a severe humanitarian crisis, has been observed. Although the Rohingya men, women and children have all suffered, somehow the prospect of men remained under the shadow providing supports. In the same way, even if the well-being and engagement of both father and mother play an important role in early childhood development, programs for fathers are limited. In response to this crisis, BRAC has initiated the Fathers' Engagement Model in host community and camps.

Under the Play to Learn project (PtL), the Fathers' Engagement Model has been designed to develop and improve fathers' knowledge of emotions and wellbeing, early childhood child development and positive parenting for the holistic development of Rohingya children aged 0-2 years. The model has incorporated culturally activities, learning through play, and emotional wellbeing, the core elements of PtL. These elements provide a learning environment for fathers that will allow them to understand and control their own emotions to contribute in the growth of their children and strengthen the relationship with their spouses.

13 father volunteers from the Rohingya community were selected and trained in child development, protection and psychosocial support to facilitate the sessions for the father's engagement intervention. Father volunteers conducted one session per week in the homes of the Rohingya community. Each of the session was 30 minutes long and a total of 12 sessions were provided to the enlisted fathers. Confidentiality of fathers were ensured to enable them to freely share their thoughts in the session.

While the need can be felt in providing such sessions to the fathers', there is a lack of evidence on how much changes these sessions can bring to their overall life, including children's holistic development as well as crating a better relationship with their wives. Therefore, this formative study was designed to understand the reflection of the beneficiary children's fathers, mothers, father volunteers, Rohingya community people, and program staff towards the Fathers' Engagement Model.

## Objective

The objective of this study was to find out the reflection of the beneficiary fathers, mothers (spouse of the fathers), father volunteers, Rohingya community people, and program staff towards the Fathers' Engagement Model.

## Methodology

In this formative study, the qualitative approach was followed. Data was collected from camp 10 which was the piloting area of the Model. through in-depth interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. All the interviews were conducted by the research and monitoring team on 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The samples were selected following the convenient sampling techniques.

Table 1: Study Participants

Types of Participants	Number of Participants
Father	10
Mother	04
Father Volunteer	04
Program People	03
Community People	04
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

## Findings

The findings of this study, illustrate the reflection of the respondents towards the Father Engagement Model across the Refugee Camp Area.

### A. Fathers' Reflection

Fathers received home visit sessions to be interviewed for their opinions regarding the Fathers' Engagement Model. The findings from the in-depth interviews are given below:

## **Understanding the Importance of this Model**

Initially when the Fathers' Engagement model began, the beneficiary fathers were not interested to join the sessions. One Rohingya father said,

*"I was not interested in joining the sessions at first because I thought all these sessions were for women."*

But it did not take long to change their perspective and after receiving two to three sessions, the fathers started to show an interest to join the sessions as they found it helpful for them. One of the beneficiary fathers said,

*"After receiving the session, my relationships with both my family and my neighbours have improved."*

Now the fathers spend more time with their children, since the sessions encouraged them to do so. Since most of the Rohingya fathers have a day job to earn their living, they often leave their home for their livelihood. Most of the Rohingya fathers work throughout the day and remain outside for a long period of time. As a result, they sometimes miss the sessions, but their willingness to attend has gradually increased over time. One father said,

*"Initially I used to miss some sessions because I had to work during the day, but now, no matter what happens, I try to make time for the sessions".*

## **Understanding the Importance of Being a Father**

The fathers who were interviewed had something in common - their responsibility as the bread earner of the family. The sessions introduced them to a new role of a father within the family, such as taking care of child when the mother is occupied, spending time with the children, and so on. One beneficiary father noted that

*"I used to think that it was my wife's responsibility to take care of our children and that my only job was to feed them. But now, whenever I can, I too try to take care of the children."*

After the sessions, all the fathers realized that earning money or food for the family is not the main goal of being a father; spending time with the family and helping their spouses is also important. The sessions increased the fathers' empathy for all children, not just their own. One father shared,

*“Now I always pay attention to the children around me. I make an effort to ensure the safety of any children I see running down the street, which I did not do before attending the sessions.”*

### **Getting Involved with the Children**

Fathers are now participating in more activities with their children. They are creating a variety of toys for their children out of low-cost and recyclable materials, such empty plastic bottles- something they learnt from the sessions. A beneficiary father shared his happiness saying,

*“I'm overjoyed that the volunteer bhai taught us how to make toys out of plastic. As a proud parent, I like seeing my child enjoy the toys I created.”*

Another father said,

*“Most of the time, I don't have enough money to buy a toy for my child, but through the session, I learnt to make a toy instead of buying one for him.”*

### **Helping with Family Chores**

The interviews with the fathers revealed that before they attended the sessions, they had no idea of the responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of women on a daily basis. One father said,

*“I thought that because my wife stays at home, she doesn't have much to do, but when volunteer bhai told us we needed to help with domestic duties, I eventually realized how hard she works.”*

Later the father said after receiving the sessions, he now knows about the household work and tries to help his wife as much as he can. This strengthens the husband-wife relationship as well as family bonding.

The father said,

*“Now I try to play with my older children when she (Mother) feeds our smallest child or goes to fetch water. I do my best to keep the children occupied”.*

## **Anger Management**

Findings reflected that fathers used to become angry over very small issues, such as receiving food late or seeing children cry. One of the fathers said,

*“I used to shout at my bibi (wife) if I did not get food on time because I felt very hungry after work”,*

But after attending the father engagement session, this tendency has drastically changed. The father who shared his view about shouting added that,

*“But now I do not shout, because volunteer bhai has taught us to manage our anger with Nissaser Beyam (breathing exercise), and now I also know it is not good to shout when angry”.*

The results also showed that, in the past, fathers did not step in to settle fights or arguments between their children, but that is also changing now. Regarding this issue, a father said,

*“When children argued, I used to believe that they would resolve it on their own. I remained silent, but during the session I realized that we cannot allow our children to fight, so now I resolve fights and tell the children that fighting is bad.”*

## **Knowledge about Mental Wellbeing and Child Development**

The findings demonstrated that the majority of the beneficiary fathers were unaware of mental wellbeing. However, now they have a platform to talk to the volunteer fathers and express their feelings. One father said,

*“I never had the opportunity to express myself, but now that I can express to a volunteer, it gives me mental peace.”*

In terms of child development, fathers expressed that now they are more knowledgeable about their children's development from what they learned at the sessions.

One of the fathers happily said,

*“I play with my child more often now which makes him (child) very happy”.*

Most of the fathers mentioned that now they feel very happy because they play with their children and spend more time with them. One of the beneficiary fathers said,

*“The words of volunteer bhai make me feel peaceful (Huni Shanti Lage) because I was unaware of so many facts regarding children”*

## **Cleanliness**

The findings of this study indicated that most of the fathers mentioned, the sessions taught them how to maintain a clean environment for both their children and themselves.

One of the fathers said,

*“My family frequently fell sick from mosquito bites because I was unaware of how they spread. But after this session, I know to maintain clean surroundings and stop water from clogging. There are now hardly any mosquitoes here.”*

The interviewees also demonstrated a determination to maintain personal hygiene.

A father said,

*“Since volunteer bhai explained to me how being clean would help me stay healthy, I try to take showers regularly and keep myself clean.”*

## **Expansion and Extension of the Current Model**

The enlisted beneficiary fathers have expressed their hope that the Fathers' Engagement Model will be implemented in every camp. Some fathers said,

*“These sessions ought to be available to all of our brothers who have children. Now, I feel really peaceful, and I think everyone needs this.”*

*“I've learned so many important things about children. I am able to make my child happy, which makes me happy. I wish if our volunteer bhai would continue to provide us with sessions for a longer period of time!”*



## **B. Mothers' Reflection:**

In this study, mothers were also interviewed, and several findings have been identified.

### **Improvement of Interpersonal Relationship with spouses**

At least two of the respondent mothers have shared that their husbands give more time to the family after receiving the session. One mother said,

*"He (husband) comes home early to play with children"*

This behavioral change has changed the relationship of the husband and wife positively. One mother stated said,

*"Now I feel very happy when I see my husband play with our child, he also makes toys for him (child)."*

### **Support from Husband**

Typically, mothers are not used to receiving support from their husbands in their daily household chores. But the scenario is changing as one of the key findings from the mother's interview revealed their happiness because of the support they are receiving from their husbands. One of the mothers said,

*"My husband has changed, thanks to the volunteer bhai. After talking with him (volunteer) my husband now takes care of our child when I am working at home"*

### **Change in General Behavior of Husband**

The respondent mothers have stated that the general behavior of their husbands is changing, they (husbands) used to stay out of home even after work, but now the husbands come home early to spend time with their children. They are also aware of the cleanliness of children, which the mothers did not notice in their husbands before they attended the father engagement sessions.

### **C. Father Volunteers' Reflection**

Father volunteers who were selected from the Rohingya community played an important role in the Fathers' Engagement Model. The findings from their interviews are discussed below:

#### **Understanding of the Father Volunteers**

Before the Fathers' Engagement Model began, the father volunteers who provided the sessions had a rational way of thinking regarding the family responsibilities of a father. A father volunteer shared that,

*"My perception towards family duty has changed drastically, I used to think taking care of children is the only responsibility of a mother"*

Now working along with the model and receiving adequate training, the father volunteers have a whole new perception of fathers' responsibility. One father volunteer said,

*"Now I try to spend more time with my child- something I did not do before I started working with the project"*

#### **Positive Change in Behavior of Fathers**

From the interviews of the father volunteers, it was observed that most of the beneficiary fathers were not eager at the beginning of the sessions. One father volunteer said,

*"We (father volunteers) were not welcomed in their house properly when the sessions started three months ago"*

But after 3 consecutive weeks of sessions, the beneficiary fathers started to show changes in their behavior and became eager to receive the sessions. One father volunteer said,

*"Now the fathers ask us (father volunteers) to make sure when we (father volunteers) will come, because they will manage their work and not miss the session"*

## **Father's Behavior towards Children**

From the interviews of the father volunteers, it has been revealed that the beneficiary father used to beat their children (aged 4-7) prior to receiving the session. However, after receiving the session, this practice has reduced remarkably. One of the father volunteers said,

*"Fathers used to beat their children without even knowing the cause, now they do not do that. When we (father volunteers) go to give a session, the fathers tell us how they control their anger with breathing exercises and try to make children understand instead of beating them."*

## **Expansion and Extension**

From the interviews of the father volunteers, it could be summarized that there is a hundred percent demand from the beneficiary fathers, that the Fathers' Engagement Model is extended and expanded to every camp, as they feel it contributes to increasing peace and harmony in the Rohingya community.

## **D. Program Staffs' Reflection**

The implementation of the Fathers' Engagement Model was largely dependent on the program staff. To get their reflection on the Fathers' Engagement Model, three project staff were interviewed, and the findings are discussed below:

### **Being Involved with the Children**

It was observed from the interviews of the project staff that, the beneficiary fathers do not buy toys for the child after receiving the session, instead they (fathers) make toys for their children from recyclable plastic bottles and cans. One of the project staff said,

*"Whenever we interact with the fathers now, they happily share their experience of making toys for their children"*

### **Platform to share their feelings and emotions**

The project staff has shared that, the beneficiary fathers are now more open with the father volunteers regarding their (father) anxieties and challenges which they could not share with anyone before. According to the project staff this will reduce the likelihood of mental illness, self-harm or suicidal tendency among the beneficiary fathers.

One project staff said,

*“I believe they (father) are happier now as they can trust and share their unsaid feelings as well as emotions with us (father volunteers).”*

### **Improvement in Etiquette and Courtesy**

Other interesting findings from the interviews of the project staff was revealed that the beneficiary fathers have improved in showing etiquette and courtesy after receiving the sessions. One project staff said,

*“When our father volunteers started to give sessions, the beneficiary fathers used to attend the session without wearing shirts (bazu). Now that has changed and they (father) dress appropriately before attending the session”*

The tendency to get involved in fights or quarrels, has significantly decreased among the beneficiary fathers. Another finding is the beneficiary fathers have become more cordial, social and friendly towards everyone including the father volunteers.

According to a project staff,

*“The beneficiary fathers now welcome us heartily and with a smile in their face.”*

### **Behavioral Changes in Imam and Alem**

Imam and Alem, the religious leaders, are the most followed and respected persons within the Rohingya community. The interviews from the project staff have reflected that the tendency to help wives in household chores among the Imam and Alem has increased significantly. A project staff said,

*“Imam and Alems are the most respected person in the community, and they are*

*now helping their wives in household work that has impacted the community in a positive way”*

### **E. Community Peoples Reflection**

In this study, Majhi (leader of a camp community), Imam (religious leader), Teacher, and Moulovi (religious preacher) are defined as the representative of the community, who have their opinion regarding any program that takes place in their vicinity. Three such representatives have been interviewed regarding the Fathers’ Engagement Model. Findings are presented below:

#### **Understanding of the Familial Duties**

The interviews of the community people have reflected that the understanding of the familial duties of fathers has increased immensely due to the Fathers’ Engagement Model. One representative of the community people said,

*“Our brothers (father) are now more concerned about their children; I have seen many fathers playing with their children and making toys for them (Child).”*

#### **Dissemination of information and knowledge within the Community**

One of the most interesting pieces of feedback from the community people is the general discussion about the Fathers’ Engagement Model within the spectrum of beneficiary fathers. The session and the content of the sessions are now the major topics of discussion in the community when the beneficiary fathers meet casually. Moreover, the discussion is not limited to the fathers who are getting the service, rather they discuss the topics in any gatherings.

According to community feedback, when the beneficiary fathers get together and spend time, they talk about the knowledge they gained from attending the sessions.

A member of the community said

*“I’ve observed that when fathers meet, they discuss about the session and how they make toys for their children.”*

## Extension and Expansion

The community people expressed their wish that the Fathers' Engagement Model must run longer and should also be available in each camp. According to the reflection of the community people due to the Fathers' Engagement Model, the community has benefited massively, as the fathers are now more involved with their children and family - this has significantly decreased violence in the area as well.

## Challenges

By analyzing the interviews a few challenges have been discovered. Firstly, the father volunteers mentioned that they found it difficult to reach the fathers at home in the morning since the father go out for work at that time. Fathers are widely available after 5 p.m.

Secondly, even though the beneficiary fathers are learning from the session, it was observed that all the fathers talked about playing with children, helping their wives etc. However, most of the beneficiaries could not recall all the contents that they learnt during the sessions.

Thirdly, as per the feedback of project staff and the father volunteers, breathing exercises in every session had become monotonous to the beneficiary fathers.

## Discussion

The present study was to understand the perception of the beneficiary children's parents, father volunteers, Rohingya community people, and program staff towards the "Father Engagement Model."

From the fathers' statements and analysis, it is found that although they were not interested in receiving the sessions initially, after attending a few sessions, they understood the importance of the information for their family and started spending time with their children through playing, having fun, and reciting *kabbyas* (poems). Regarding spending time with their children, mothers expressed that recipient fathers had been more attentive towards their children and domestic duties. Mothers agreed that their husbands began assisting their spouses with household tasks and child rearing activities. They said that after receiving the lessons, fathers had also become more aware of safety for their children.

During the intervention, the community members also witnessed similar improvements in the fathers.

With regard to managing stress and emotions, the beneficiary fathers responded that they learned about the breathing exercise from the sessions, that helped them to relax, destress and address other psychological issues. The learnings from the sessions also helped the fathers to express their anger and other emotional instabilities in a comparatively healthier way. However, the program staff mentioned that in spite of the fact that the breathing exercise is beneficial for mental health, daily practice of breathing exercise in the same way sometimes brings boredom or monotonous feelings to the beneficiary fathers.

During the sessions, the father volunteers taught the fathers to make toys on their own, using the low cost and recyclable materials. The program staff also shared their experiences that the beneficiary fathers no longer purchase toys for their children and instead happily make toys at home. Apart from this, the program staff reported that earlier the beneficiary fathers did not wear shirts, or t-shirts when any guest or neighbor came to the house. However, after receiving the sessions, they started to dress appropriately when meeting the guests. Hence, their behavior has positively changed regarding welcoming people, exchanging greetings etc. Moreover, the program staff said that the community members' willingness to work together on household tasks and raising children has grown a lot, especially among Imam and Alem, who are the religious leaders of the Rohingya community.

Despite some challenges, the beneficiary fathers as well as the community people felt that this type of session could be provided in the other camps so that the rest of the Rohingya community can learn about the "Fathers' Engagement Model" and understand its significance. Therefore, the Father's Engagement Model provided positive impact not only on the beneficiary fathers, but also on mothers, children and even in the community.

## **Recommendations**

According to the findings of the study, the following feedbacks may help to meet the objective more immaculately:

- An alternative timing that would be convenient for the beneficiary fathers could be considered to provide the session as it became difficult for them to manage time in the morning

- In addition to regular breathing exercise, a substitute could be inaugurated so that the monotonous chain can be broken
- Another pilot program on group session can be conducted





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