

# CHAPTER 14

## Male Participation

### 14 .1 Introduction

The focus on men's responsibilities in sexual and reproductive health, along with their roles in families and their participation as fathers, is increasing worldwide.

One of the main reasons for men's limited involvement in their children's affairs results from socialization and social construction. Girls and boys learn their gender specific roles from a very young age. Boys and men assume the role of protectors and providers, leaving household work and child rearing for girls and women.

While some researches suggest that women are biologically adjusted to their children's needs, there is a growing consensus that child care is an acquired skill that girls learn at a very young age. Research also shows that if given a chance, boys and men can also demonstrate the same skills.

The present consensus among the professionals all over the world now is that men's participation as fathers, as co-parents and their role as partners of women, in domestic chores, child care, and childrearing do matter. Some studies have suggested that father's presence and participation is associated with higher attainment of school degrees, in the case of boys.

Men, who are involved with their children in meaningful ways, are of the opinion that this relationship is one of their most important sources giving a sense of well-being and happiness. Various qualitative studies and accounts of men from around the world suggest that men, who are engaged in caring and care-giving relationships, including fatherhood, may be less likely to engage themselves in certain risky behaviour types such as criminal activity. This provides men with a powerful, potential motivation for them wanting to become more involved as fathers. In some other instances, we observe that some men, who may have had only limited interaction with their children in the past, become affectionate grandfathers.

There is evidence, world wide, that men's active and non violent participation in the care of children is quite beneficial for children, for the women and for the men themselves. Children of such fathers show better health and developmental outcomes. According to some studies, men who develop positive connections with their children have less mental health problems.

Fatherhood needs to be addressed in conjunction with motherhood, and in the wider context of the family. It cannot be addressed in isolation. It further relates to the larger issue of masculinity and manhood. In order to change traditional notions of fatherhood, self-interest of men and boys in being better fathers needs to be emphasized.

It is essential that we tap men's self interest on being caring fathers. When men agree that they want to play an important role in the lives of their children the chance of resistance from them are minimal. It is also the fathers' self interest that having a close relationship with their children will make the children perpetuate their ideals and values.

Special efforts should be made to emphasize men's shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behavior, including family planning, maternal and child health, prevention of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, shared control and contribution to family income, children's education, health and nutrition. Male responsibilities in the family life should be included in the education of children from the earliest ages. Special emphasis should be placed on the prevention of violence against women and children.

To create a more gender equitable society, we need to work with fathers at home and address the prevalent socialization process, which can make boys prepared for a more caring fatherhood. This intersects with child development as boys and girls gain high self esteem from a secure family environment where both mothers and fathers are involved in child rearing. As such, when fathers participate in child care, there are positive outcomes for children, family, society and the father himself. Working on fatherhood is an effective and a long term investment towards creating a gender equitable and a gender just society.

We need to reinforce the positive forms of fatherhoods that exist in the society, where fathers do care and nurture – we need to promote these practices and make them visible, so that more men/boys take pride in family care and nurturing. Finally, we need to encourage men and boys who are gender sensitive and understand and take responsibility towards their children. Indeed most men want to support their children in multiple and meaningful ways and have the potential to do so. Such men do exist amongst us; the challenge is to identify them, as they often hide behind the facade of societal expectations.

In every society, even where strict gender norms exist, there are voices of men who are willing to take on concerns affecting women and children. The challenge is to find these voices as they can become our entry points in many cases.

At the same time, we need to be realistic, as we cannot pretend to dissolve tradition that is thousands of years old. We need to celebrate small successes. This is an up hill task that requires commitment and resolve, along with a clear strategy.

Community and society at large must be sensitized and made aware of the problem of gender based violence prevalent in Sri Lanka. To begin with, society in general must be educated on the fact that domestic violence is a social issue and not a private one. Health workers should take the initiative and leading role for building up of a non-violent culture. The valuable contribution of the primary health care team is essential, so as to achieve the target of a healthy nation through a violence free culture.

### **14.2 Benefits of Male Participation**

- Enhances the household security in every aspect.
- Improves peace and harmony in the family.
- Increased health and happiness in the family.
- House becomes a pleasant place to live in for all members of the family.
- Man gets a mental satisfaction because his services are appreciated.
- Improvement of health status and educational status of the children.
- Improvement of the nutritional status of the family.
- Improvement of family welfare, since correct and collective decisions are taken regarding family matters.
- Boosts the spiritual health of the family.
- Prevention from sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS.
- Prevention of unintended and unwanted pregnancies and thereby prevention of abortions.
- Enhances the mental and social development of children.
- Family requirements could be fulfilled easily and successfully.
- Can set an example to other families.
- Would have a good reputation and acceptance from the society.
- Able to have the desired number of children with adequate spacing.
- Improved economical status of the family.
- Self satisfaction with regard to good parenthood/ fatherhood.

### **Factors that hinder male participation**

- Men think that engaging in household chores is an insult to manhood.
- Societal belief that household chores are only the sole responsibility of women.
- Influence of elders, parents etc.
- Negative attitudes of friends/peers.
- Some women not wanting to get the support of men for their work.
- Some times work done by men are not appreciated and valued by women.
- Men's unawareness about the day to day happenings at home.  
E.g. If he has not experienced male participation for household chores during childhood
- Feeling and understanding that child rearing is only the responsibility of the woman.
- Inadequacy of time for the male to participate in household chores.
- Traditional societal myths and beliefs.
- Domestic violence.
- Alcohol and drug abuse.

### **How to recognize that a particular family has the privilege of male participation?**

Father's participation is generally measured as availability, engagement and responsibility.

### **Indications of positive fatherhood will be seen in the family such as –**

- Family members look happy and peaceful.
- Husband looks after the security and welfare of the wife and family.
- Husband does not take decisions in family matters alone, always discusses with wife and elders before taking major decisions.
- Pays attention in bringing wife and children for healthcare/clinics.
- Spends time for the happiness and welfare of the family.

- Eager to know about the health of the wife and the children.
- Assists wife in rearing children.
- Interested in the nutrition of the wife and the children.
- Interested in contraception.
- Believes and respects the wife. Does not let her down in front of others.
- Does not verbally, mentally or physically abuse the wife or children.
- Always works towards the building up of the personality of wife and children.
- In the evening wife eagerly awaits the husband's return after work.
- Wife always praises and appreciates husband's participation.
- Wife always looks after the needs and requirements of the husband.
- Couple always maintains mutual respect.
- All members of the family enjoy a tasty meal together at least once a day.

### **14.3 The role of the PHI in promoting male participation**

At the community, family and individual level, positive reinforcements of fatherhood are vital. Awareness campaigns and educational programmes need to be undertaken to sensitize all generations.

#### **Individual Level**

In the field, primary health care workers may come across cases of domestic violence or gender based violence, and it is very essential to assist or help the victim and the perpetrator, so as to manage or prevent violence. Some times PHMM may seek PHI's assistance to discuss the matters with perpetrators. It is vital to discuss the matters, listen and assist both the victim and the perpetrator in resolving the conflict.

- In most of the instances of gender based violence the perpetrator is a man, and PHI is the ideal official to discuss matters with him and assist him.
- PHI should be aware (knowledgeable) about the resource network of govt. agencies and other non govt. organizations who are actively involved in management and prevention of gender based violence.
- If the matter cannot be handled alone, the PHI should refer perpetrator to the MOH for referral to the following services according to his needs.
  - counseling
  - anger management skills
  - coping with stress
  - problem solving
  - decision making
  - reducing use of alcohol
  - rehabilitation
- PHI should be an active member of the MOH team, specially in creating awareness among the males on family planning and also should take an active role in providing family planning services to males such as distribution of condoms.

#### **Family Level**

- PHI should be able to create awareness among the newly married couples on male participation, the benefits of non violence and how non-violence contributes to the health and well being of the whole family.
- PHI should be able to appreciate, encourage and promote male participation when ever it is observed in a family.

### **Community Level**

As a member of the MOH team PHI should be able to actively involve with the other members of the team in fulfilling the following tasks;

#### **For pre-school children**

Children even before they learn to speak begin internalizing gender norms informed by the behaviour of adults around them. Therefore, we need to begin intervening at this stage.

- To sensitize the pre-school teachers on male participation, and promote them to motivate the pre-school children on male participation.

#### **For school children and teachers**

An ideal entry point for long term community intervention could be at school level. School children being a captive audience could be used as an effective tool to communicate their knowledge to families as well as the community.

- To sensitize and motivate the school children on male participation
- Also, it is necessary to empower school teachers through teacher trainings, after school programmes and through other educational activities, as they are in a position to influence school children.

#### **For fathers**

Fatherhood provides meaning and happiness to many men's lives.

- To sensitize the fathers on the benefits of male participation

This is the way to change as children who see fathers providing care, are less likely to accept stereotypical roles. It is also vital to work with fathers on anger management and conflict resolutions.

#### **For adolescents and youth**

Boys tend to learn good and responsible behaviour from their peers, engaging in tasks that their fathers did not undertake. As such, it is vital to sensitize the adolescents and youth on this matter.

- Community based programmes should be carried out for adolescents and youth, sensitizing them on male participation and gender based violence.

#### **For village leaders, community leaders and religious leaders**

We will have to target shifting of community attitude towards positive male participation, towards non acceptance of violence, to reduce use of alcohol and also the disapproval of aggression/ violence after use of alcohol.