

A STEP UP for Fathers with Special Needs Children

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Abstract

Background: The role of fathers in the family has altered significantly, after profound demographic and socioeconomic shift in the society. There is a greater expectation of fathers to be involved in the household matters and family, as the gender ideologies become more egalitarian, as many mothers are joining in the workforce, seeking employment, pursuing their career, and closing up society's gap with men (International Conference Fatherhood in 21st Century Asia: Research, Interventions and Policies, 2010).

Fathers who had taken on the altered role in the family; entered in a whole new experience of becoming more involved in the growing age of their children. However, it has been observed that fathers are generally aloof and struggling to raise a special need children in their family due to lack of awareness and understanding. It is also evident that families are falling apart due to mismatch in the expectation to raise special need children in the family. It is crucial to maintain a strong family bond through appropriate father's engagement in the family.

According to Wilson and Prior (2011), Children's development is influenced by the quantity and quality of father involvement (FI) in their care. It has been observed that high levels of FI are associated with significant positive desirable outcomes for children well-being and their families. In order to foster increased positive FI, it is essential to disseminate of evidence-based knowledge and demonstrate its importance and value. Evidence suggests that fathers and mothers alike need to be an educated about the fact of positive paternal involvement, which is highly beneficial to all children during their developmental age.

The research findings suggest positive outcome on the altered role of fathers in the family being more effective for all children. From the research findings titled – 'The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence'. It is

clear that father involvement has enormous implications for men on their own path of adult development, for their wives and partners in the co-parenting relationship and, most importantly, for their children in terms of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Allen & Daly, 2007).

Objectives: The primary purpose of the programme is to engage fathers of special need children, and bring them into a community, which empower them to cope with their current and/ or future transitional challenges in the family.

Methodology:

Theoretical Approach & Modality

The programme focuses on the following theoretical approaches:

- Strengths-based perspective approach (Saleebey 2000)
- The Grief Journey during the fathers support group session (Schultz & Schultz, 1990, 1997)

Participants

- N=19 (Fathers)
- Fathers of children diagnosed with mild intellectual disability with/ without comorbid Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Assessment: Pre-event and post-event discussion session.
- Procedure
- Programme: 3 hours fathers' session, consists of sharing from school social workers, external speaker perspectives, and fathers' sharing & group activity (structured experience).

The different programme sessions will focus on the following topics:

- 1) Self-care
- 2) Father & Child relationship
- 3) Family & Spousal Relationship

Results: Qualitative data were collected (n=19). Collected data were analysed using thematic approach and analysis. Thematic analysis suggested that emotional support (Theme 1) for fathers are necessary and crucial. In addition, group of fathers realized that they need to develop a basis skill-set for self-care (Theme 2) to help their peers (Theme 3) as well, to cope with challenges in the family. Furthermore, many fathers felt as well that on-going support through regular group session (Theme 4) may be another way forward to get additional help, if necessary or prudent.

Conclusion: In conclusion, many fathers gave feedbacks that the programme is beneficial as it helps them to better cope with their emotional well-being. The programme also helps them to support their family and children's holistic development in the home setting