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**Research Article**

# Parenting education programs in the Arab region

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides an analysis of three focus group discussions (FGDs) held in Morocco, Jordan, and Oman, with a specific focus on the importance of fathers' involvement in the programs. Data is based on the 2021 Doha International Family Institute study entitled "Parenting Programs in the Arab Region" conducted by the Ibn Khaldun Center for Research and Studies, Jordan. It begins with the information currently accessible based on assessing pertinent literature on parenting education programs. Members participated in the FGDs to explore their experiences with parenting programs and how those programs affected their parenting knowledge and skills. All three focus group sessions were only attended by women, reinforcing the perception of traditional gender roles and obligations. The paper concludes with recommendations toward the promotion of fathers' involvement in programs, such as enacting paternity and parental laws, involving religious clerics that can advocate for the importance of father involvement during Friday prayers.

**Keywords:** parenting, parenting education programs, parental support, father inclusion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights identified the family as the basic unit of society and required that it should be protected (Article 16(3), United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Yet, even with such a proclamation from an international commitment, the topic surrounding the family is slowly becoming more and more complicated, especially when taking into consideration the changing roles and responsibilities within this unit. Thus, questions can now be raised about the role of the state in bearing the responsibilities of families, as opposed to the role of the family itself. Moreover, with the increasing integration of women into the market force, family responsibilities are changing in dynamics and the state is required to consider ways to assist families in their responsibilities, allowing fathers a more inclusive role within the family unit.

That being said, the family remains the cradle for nurturing and socializing children, and it is within the family that children become adults that are then integrated into society to function and continue the cycle. Parental support represents one form of assistance that has always been given through informal relationships and wide family nets. Yet, it was with the proclamation of the International Year of the Family in 1994 that such support was established officially at the international level (UNESCO, 1994). Parental support can take on various forms, such as social protection measures, conditional cash transfers to parents, as well as parenting education programs. This allows the state as well as

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<https://doi.org/10.5339/difi.2023.5>

Submitted: 05 October 2022  
Accepted: 08 January 2022  
Published: 15 February 2023

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non-governmental organizations to underline and direct the roles and responsibilities that parents are expected to take on. Not only do state policies and programs define and project the responsibilities of the state in correspondence to that of parents, but they also provide the necessary support in relation to multiple familial responsibilities, such as child education, health, and well-being.

Yet, it is important to note that the policy environment is critical in identifying the type of support that can be provided by the state to parents and families. The institutional, political, and resource allocation existing in any country paves the way for the type of support that will be provided. Parenting education programs are usually grounded on existing service and resource infrastructure, where support is already given to families in general and parents specifically as a part of other resources, such as social, health, educational, early childhood development, social protection, and cash transfers (Britto et al., 2015).

The following will address the importance of developing and implementing parenting education programs while highlighting the “parenting gender gap” and addressing the importance of including fathers in the programs. The paper will base its findings on the report undertaken by the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) on “Parenting Programs in the Arab Region” (2021). To understand the impact of these programs, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in Morocco, Jordan, and Oman, presenting a geographical distribution of countries from the Arab region. The FGDs were held with program participants with the aim of understanding the viewpoints of parents on their experiences with parenting programs and whether these programs had any impact on their parenting skills and knowledge. The FGD participants in all three programs were females, which strengthens the traditional notion around the roles and responsibilities of fathers in comparison to mothers, where fathers are the main breadwinners and mothers are the main caretakers. The paper concludes by explaining the importance of father involvement in child development and proposes ways to promote the inclusion of fathers in parenting programs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The international agenda – highlighting the importance of families and parents in child development

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the General Assembly under resolution number 44/25 on the 20th of November 1989, and it entered into force on the 2nd of September 1990. The family was mentioned in the CRC 17 times. The first mention of the family is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) definition (UN General Assembly, 1948) that claims that the family is “the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children” (CRC, 1990, p. 1). As such, the CRC proposes that not only should the family be protected, but that it should also be supported by governments, in order for it to undertake its role in taking care of children. Moreover, the CRC states the importance of a happy and loving environment. Article 2 of the CRC introduces family members when discussing the measures to be taken against discrimination or punishment against children “on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians, or family members” (CRC, 1990, p. 2). This statement restates that children are connected to family members, whereas there is no mention of state guardianship, assuming that children will always be with parents, legal guardians, or family members. Article 5 of the CRC clarifies that parents, extended family, community, and legal guardians have certain rights and responsibilities that must be respected by the state, within the framework of the CRC. The CRC also provides the child with the right to retain their own identity, including their family relations (p. 3). Thus, not only does the CRC underscore the importance of the family in the socialization and care of children, but it also highlights the environment in which a child should grow up.

### 2.2 The role of the family and the state

Socialization begins in the family, where a child moves into adulthood and is equipped with social understandings, compatible with society’s expectations. Although it is important to note that other institutions share this task of socialization, such as schools, the family remains the largest provider of this form of education (Wasoff and Dey, 2000). The family also holds an emotional bond through providing care and protection to each other; noting that this

relationship can only work within the boundaries of the family. The family thus holds various responsibilities that Wasoff and Dey (2000) summarize to include “reproduction, socialization, care and protection, distribution and work” (p. 9). Reproduction is an act that can only be done through the family, where all human beings are born to at least one parent. The state cannot reproduce children, and they cannot reciprocate the bond between the parent and child. However, “the view that it is clearly the family’s *duty* to care clashes with the view that women have a *right* to work outside the home and therefore should be able to make choices, at the very least, about caring responsibilities” (Deakin and Wicks 1988, p. 13). As such, it is important to note that care within the family is under dispute from a feminist perspective, especially by advocates of gender equality, where they call for equality in the provision of care within the family, such that it should not be the burden of the mother or woman alone. Moreover, research shows that although women are vital for the continuation of societies, specifically since they are characteristically different to men given their reproductive and nurturing roles, they are nevertheless, undervalued, and in dire need of protection from both state and society (Spakes, 1996). That being said, the role of fathers is as critical and although it has been seeing more attention globally, is yet to reach its full potential (Lamb, 2010).

### 2.3 Why positive parenting matters

Parenting education programs revolve around an important belief that aims to advance the notion of positive or nurturing parenting. This terminology focuses mainly on providing parents and caregivers with the necessary skills and ideas around positive discipline and finding alternate forms of discipline. These programs also provide parents with assistance in the identification and comprehension of the required communication between parents and their children and that can protect children against all forms of physical violence. Moreover, these programs also educate parents on their children’s potential skills, which include emotional regulation, problem-solving, and social skills that can assist children in gaining a certain understanding of how to resolve conflict without experiencing or committing violence in any of its forms in their futures (Butchart et al, 2016). Thus, the main takeaway from focusing on positive and nurturing parenting is to draw a path that promotes a safe, protective, and caring environment for all children of all ages (Butchart et al, 2016).

On the one hand, early experiences, including responsive and positive interactions with adults, parents, and caregivers, are critical for children’s development, growth, and health. Parents play a vital role in facilitating early experiences through the provision of nurturing care, defined as care which ensures health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, social-emotional well-being, and early learning. A wide body of research on infant and childhood development shows that nurturing, responsive, and stimulating interactions between young children and their parents and caregivers positively and permanently strengthen the ability to learn with the possibility of changing brain function for life.

In many ways, parents govern their children’s lives, especially when noting that positive parenting determines children’s success in early learning and development. This implies that the consequences of impassive and harmful parenting are detrimental. Poor or harmful parenting can impact child development in multiple ways, including that of the biological mind chemistry, in such a way that contradicts with positive progress.

It is important to note that a parent and caregiver’s aptitude to instinctively care for young children may be affected by multiple factors, including, for example, limited resources, such as early development and learning toys, healthy food and nutrition, anxiety as well as poor physical and mental health of parents that might diminish their ability to address and react to their children’s signals, or lack of knowledge and skills that revolve around child development.

It is also worth providing a specific mention to the parenting of adolescents, a phase which is unique in nature and which requires certain skills and knowledge from parents in relation to the care and development of their adolescents while taking into consideration their specific needs and rights. This part of a child’s life is characterized by rapidly changing physiological development, including, but not limited to, biological, physical, psychological, emotional, and mental changes. Moreover, social changes are taking place at rapid speed, including, for example, adolescent’s finding their individuality, away from that of their families, especially taking into consideration the increasing influence of their peers on their decisions and mindsets, as well as enhanced gender-influenced roles, and the need to take more risks and push the boundaries. It is thus an extremely difficult and challenging time for parents to figure out the parenting pathway to take in dealing with their adolescents. Additionally, research has shown that parental practices affect adolescents’ behaviors

and attitudes more than any other external or internal factor (Butchart et al, 2016). Positive parenting impacts overall development, including health, education, child protection, and well-being for all children, including adolescents.

Parenting education programs also represent a critical aspect within the policy framework that helps to end the inter-generational cycle of poverty and violence and social exclusion, diminishes existing inequalities, and encourages the healthy development of children and adolescents. Within this context, it is important to underscore the role that parenting programs play in child and adolescent development and to specially showcase the importance of developing and implementing evidence-based programs.

#### **2.4 What are parenting education programs?**

In today's world, children are developing within a global scene that showcases vital developments within a rapidly growing basis of evidence, which provides a strong grounding for understanding the needs of both children as well as parents that would pave the way for child well-being and development. The large body of evidence contributes to the development of a stronger policy and programmatic framework that supports fathers and mothers in their roles and responsibilities (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016).

Parenting education programs represent one form of support provided to parents and caregivers. They aim to increase responsiveness to the important part that parents and caregivers play in child development and wellbeing and to augment the methods, philosophical basis, and practices of parents and caregivers on childcare and development. Ultimately, these programs should provide parents with the necessary knowledge and skills that support them in their parenting styles and techniques (Al-Hassan, 2009). Thus, parenting education programs provide a vital roadmap for parents that influences their children's development and well-being from the beginning of their lives until they become active members of society. Moreover, parenting programs take into consideration the internationally agreed-upon rights of children to socialization and development in a constantly supportive and caring familial setting.

Taking all the above into consideration, parenting programs are thus defined as services geared toward assisting parents in the development of positive knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Parenting programs support parents and caregivers to better comprehend the importance of parenting, specifically in relation to early childhood development and the role of caregiving, as well as the vital role they can play for children to develop and achieve their full potential.

Parenting education programs should tackle an array of parenting skills and practices, by including content around the topics of health, well-being, food and nutrition, and protection. Such programs should be established to support parents and caregivers to develop their own skills and practices and help them realize their potential in positive parenting as well as learn new techniques that can advance their children's health, development, education, and well-being and safeguard them from violence (DIFI, 2022).

At the international level, parenting education programs are mainly focused on early childhood development, noting the lack of focus on adolescent development and care. Thus, noting that while there is ample evidence that highlights the importance of such forms of interventions at an early stage of a child's life, there is little evidence that evaluated parenting programs directed at parents and caregivers of adolescents. Moreover, most evidence-based programs and impact assessment studies are based in western high-income societies, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (DIFI, 2022).

#### **2.5 The impact of parenting programs**

As previously mentioned, evidence has shown the importance of positive and nurturing parenting on child development and wellbeing, both during the early years as well as during their adolescent periods. Despite noting that healthy parenting impacts children and adolescents' mental and physical health, as well as advances communication between the parents or caregivers and their children, the promotion and advancement of positive parenting practices remains a difficult task and is faced with multiple challenges. For example, data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) surveys of low- and middle-income countries developed and implemented by UNICEF (2016) indicates that at least half of the participating parents found parenting programs gained knowledge on parental conduct helpful, especially in relation to early childhood development.

In relation to the impact of parenting education programs on vulnerable families, Byrne et al. (2013) studied the impact of individual and collective effects on variations in parental practices as a result of parenting education programs. The study aimed to identify the consequences of specific factors specifically in relation to the reporting of both positive and negative paternal techniques as well as the impact of familial support for parents. The participating parents were identified by the doctors and social workers, within the sphere of social services that tackle children at risk of abuse. Individual factors included the parent's age, gender, educational attainments, family structure, number of children, residence, and financial support. Furthermore, the study is built on the model of the basic growth curve of the adopted data (sets) to study the relative effect of individual and group factors on pre-post fluctuations in parental methods. This form of study describes the development of the average population over a certain period of time. However, attention was given to highlighting and understanding the differences among participants in relation to the restrictions that affect their growth curves. It also provides an assessment of the motives behind any parental change.

Singer et al. (1999) aimed at understanding the attitudes of parents toward parenting education programs. The study's main findings focus on how parents found such programs helpful, especially in relation to supporting them in parenting children with disabilities.

When looking at the impact of parenting education programs on families with divorced parents, Keating et al. (2016) focused on understanding the impact of parenting education programs on incohesive families, specifically those with divorced parents in Ireland. The study underscores the effectiveness of these programs in developing parental satisfaction as well as reducing existing conflict between parents, noting especially the impact of such conflict on children and parenting techniques.

Parenting education programs have also been directed at preventing child abuse cases. In this regard, Chen and Chan (2016) aimed to study the success of parental education programs in reducing child abuse and changing impacting factors. The study looked at nine online databases to discover controlled trials published before September 2013. It assessed the impact of multiple results at numerous points in time. Of the 3,578 reports found, 37 were selected for further study. The results of the report found that parenting programs had positively impacted self-reported abuse and decreased the probability of child abuse; programs also reduced the related risk factors and enhanced the protective influences relating to child abuse. That being said, the impact of parenting education programs was not as effective in diminishing maternal depression and anxiety. Chen and Chan (2016) clarified that parenting programs leave a positive impact in low-, medium-, and high-income countries in relation to reducing child abuse, specifically when implemented as a primary, secondary, or tertiary intervention directly aimed at preventing child abuse.

Parenting programs have also addressed parenting children with behavioral problems. Barlow and Coren (2017) looked at implementing parental care practices and attained important results for children. Parental education programs focused specifically on care can provide a specific pathway to supporting parents with the aim of achieving child development and well-being. The study conducted a systematic study of parenting education programs published in the Campbell Library. Six studies addressed the effectiveness of parenting interventions on the deterrence and addressing of behavioral problems with children aged between 0 and 3 years; dealing with the beginning of behavioral disorders with children aged between 3 and 12 years; enhanced results for parents of children who suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; improved results for parents and children with mental disabilities; and support parents in their psychological and social attitudes. Their findings showed the effectiveness of parenting education programs in impacting the emotional and behavioral influences as well as advancing the psychological and social well-being of parents.

Another study on reducing child abuse and behavioral problems was reported by Cluver et al. (2017), aimed at developing a program that assists in the prevention of adolescent abuse in South Africa, where violence against children increases once they are in adolescence age. A pilot study for low-resource settings was applied in partnership with non-governmental organizations, governmental entities, and academics in South Africa, building on evidence-based ideologies. The research built on a pre-task method to test the preliminary impact of the 10-session parental support program with 60 participants (30 caregivers-adolescent groups) in rural areas. The programs had a moderate to large impact in reducing child abuse and behavioral problems in adolescents and a substantial impact in developing positive parenting techniques and practices. The results thus showed that parenting education programs helped reduce child abuse, develop parenting skills and knowledge, and diminish adolescent behavioral problems in South Africa.

Gardner et al. (2015) also addressed the impact of parenting programs on child behavior in their study that underscored evidence-based parenting programs implemented with families of children with behavioral attitudes, between the ages of 3 and 10. The study highlighted such programs in countries that had already implemented various parenting interventions. However, information on the effect of these programs when transferred to other countries was not highlighted including studying the success factors. However, it is worth noting that this was the first methodical study to address this topic while focusing on programs that help decrease child behavioral problems. The report was developed in phases; Phase I highlighted the available evidence-based parenting education programs that have had a strong impact. Phase II, on the other hand, underscored the transfer of these interventions to other countries. Gardner et al. (2015) then conducted a systematic review using aggregate analysis of the transferred programs, and subgroup analyses were derived based on multiple factors such as the culture and policy environment. Seventeen pilot programs were transferred from four interventions that were developed in the United States or Australia and implemented in ten countries in five regions. The impact on child behavior was significant in 14 randomized samples, but insignificant in three non-randomized samples. Subgroup analyses of the randomized trials showed no correlation between the influencing or intervention factors. Parenting education programs that were transferred to Western countries showed comparable results, whereas the effect was higher in more socially remote areas. The impact of the transferred programs was higher in countries that focused on family-based child care and protection than those that focused more on individual well-being. Moreover, parenting education programs were notably more impactful when transferred to countries that differed in culture and their service and program provisions than in those in which the programs were developed.

Moran et al. (2004) identified the existence of global data on the effect of parental education programs collected by the Policy Research Bureau (PRB). Taking into consideration the array of evidence that suggests the impact of parental care on child wellbeing outcomes, numerous programs were developed to assist parents in their parental capabilities, with the aim that the programs will result in improved outcomes for children. On that note, research assessing the impact of parenting education programs was collected and studied. The report gathered, classified, structured, and summarized the literature pertaining to the evaluation of parenting education programs with the aim of highlighting best practices in the United Kingdom and providing a specific recommendation for policymakers on best practices, research, and comprehensive national policy frameworks. The findings show that although families benefit from parental support, it is much more difficult to encourage fathers to participate. Moreover, although the number of parenting education programs has increased in the UK, yet impact assessment studies have not increased. That being said, the report highlighted that the implementation of evidence-based programs is a critical pathway to supporting parents, especially when coupled within a national framework that supports parents in the care and development of their children.

Certain parenting programs have also addressed parents with gifted children. Morawska and Sanders (2009) studied the conceptual and practical basis of parenting gifted children. In light of the absence of evidence that addresses the needs of gifted children and the required support that their parents and families search for, there was an evident lack of evidence-based parenting interventions that can support parents of gifted children. This study thus provides a rapid look at the available research, specifically dealing with the difficulties faced by parents of gifted children, specifically focusing on identifying the characteristics of parenting programs developed for this group of parents. A qualitative survey was conducted with parents of gifted children, with the aim of identifying the main topics categorized under the provision of care and support to parents. The program defines the clinical impact and addresses evidence-based approaches toward supporting parents of gifted children. The report provides a detailed approach in relation to the multiple ways of caring for and nurturing a gifted child, especially noting the lack of knowledge that parents with gifted children have and need in order to support them in the undertaking of their roles and responsibilities. The report calls for the development of parenting education programs specifically aimed at parents of gifted children.

Finally, in relation to addressing parents with mental health disorders that have children, Craig (2004) gave a complete picture by highlighting available data that focuses on parenting education programs developed and implemented with mothers of young children with mental health disorders. A systematic literature review was conducted and included an analysis of bibliographic databases such as MEDLINE, CINAHL, PsycINFO, the Cochrane database of methodical studies, and EMBASE

psychiatry database (Craig, 2004). Furthermore, a study of journals and English language books was restricted to the last five years, while taking into consideration former literature where applicable. The studies showed that a mother's mental health disorder can have negative effects on a child's development and well-being (ibid). Mothers' mental health disorders impacted cognitive development, behavioral issues, and increased the risk of psychological disorders. Preventive parental skills were recommended as an effective response to these results. Studies that looked at the effects of parenting education programs on women with mental health disorders were not found; thus the long-term potential impact of these programs remains undetermined. That being said, parenting education programs for women with mental health disorders could represent a strong preventive measure, noting, however, that such programs will need to be implemented under a specific criterion. For example, the study showed that such programs should address common parenting struggles while focusing on the specific needs and requirements of women with mental health disorders (Craig, 2004).

With that said, a major research gap noted in the literature highlights that the majority of the evidence pertaining to the effectiveness of parenting education programs is from high-income countries, where conditions are different from those of poor or middle-income countries, specifically in relation to available resources, capacities, and considerations of the policy and program environments. For example, there is a notable variation in the focus of parenting programs directed at early childhood development, specifically in relation to the various methods and techniques used, which makes it difficult to categorize the features that affect each program. Also, there is an absence of available information on the scope, sustainability, and incorporation of parenting education programs in existing environments, especially when addressing programs that are directed at vulnerable families and disadvantaged groups. Finally, there is limited evidence available that tackles the curriculum and content of parenting programs. In light of these gaps, this paper looks at parenting education programs in three Arab countries (Jordan, Morocco, and Oman), thus highlighting a picture from the Middle East and North African countries with the aim of filling the gap in the literature in reviewing these programs from a differing geographical scope than that available in the literature. Therefore, the paper will provide an analysis of the constituents of these programs, specifically highlighting program participation.

### 3. METHODS

As previously mentioned, this paper highlights one specific finding from the DIFI (2022) report on "Parenting Education Programs in the Arab region".

Three focus groups were conducted, with 11, 12, and 15 female participants in programs in Jordan, Oman, and Morocco respectively in 2018. These groups sought a thorough understanding of identifying parental needs, program quality, parenting program awareness levels, and participation motivation. The focus groups also sought to understand how parents felt about the programs and how closely the abilities acquired corresponding to the issues encountered. To find areas for improvement, program benefits, satisfaction levels, and efficacy were examined. In the focus groups, participants' ages, genders, family sizes, incomes, and levels of education were also asked about. Since many of the participants were working women, it was challenging to reach them; therefore, it was essential to make their contact information more accessible. The organizations that managed the initiatives' execution were contacted by the researchers as a result. The groups were instructed to make contact with the participants and seek their permission to participate. For individuals who agreed to participate in the focus group meetings, transportation was also offered along with the recommended venue, time, and date. Accessing participants became challenging, particularly given that there were many of them. The program questions centered on several significant themes and open-ended sub-questions. In contrast, the participant's demographic profile included their age, education, marital status, job status, and family size. Examples of the inquiries were as follows: What are the program's objectives? Describe the program's substance. What services were offered by the program? Who carried out these interventions (nurses, educators, social workers, etc.) and where were they carried out (house, clinic, school, neighborhood, etc.)?

The transcription of the responses was analyzed using discourse analysis. It thus identified common patterns among the programs, their characteristics, and their advantages. They were then classified according to type, objectives, and region.

### Validity and reliability

The triangulation approach used validity and reliability. The first step was to study the parenting education courses that were offered. After that, regional institutional mapping of parenting education programs in the Arab world was carried out. Finally, the study examined participants' perspectives of parental education programs through FGDs, taking into account the findings of the research on the programs that are currently accessible and notably emphasizing the dearth of studies in the MENA region.

## 4. RESULTS

The study findings showed that only females partook in all three parenting education programs. The programs showed an array of characteristics, such that their types ranged from educational to training to support programs; they provided focus on the family, the child, and the individual; they targeted both parents and children, and mothers specifically. The programs mainly tackled the topics of parenting children with behavioral programs, taking into consideration the impact of modern technology on parenting and providing solutions to marital and familial conflicts. The programs were mainly conducted by social workers and professional trainers within the field. The programs were held in schools, non-governmental organizations, as well as local community organizations.

In Jordan, 11 females participated, and their ages ranged from 24 to 40. The majority of them were married, while 2 were single. Out of the 11 participants, 3 of them did not have any children. Their family size ranged from having three to six children. The majority held a university degree, with only one female holding a diploma.

In Oman, 12 females participated, and their ages ranged from 21 to 32. Half of the participants were single, three were married and three were divorced before marital consummation. The majority did not have children, and from the three that did, their family sizes ranged between five and seven.

As for Morocco, 11 females partook in the program, their ages ranging from 24 to 49 years, and all were married. Only one of the participants did not have any children, and the family size for the other participants ranged between two and seven. Out of the 11 participants, 4 were high-school graduates, 4 held undergraduate degrees, 2 held postgraduate degrees, and 1 held a diploma.

All participants in the three programs were then asked about their opinions on the parenting education programs that they participated in, their expectations, and what they got out of the programs. Table 1 highlights these factors in a comparative format between the three countries.

**Table 1. Program participants responses.**

	Jordan	Oman	Morocco
Identifying the needs of parents	Parenting techniques	Awareness of parental matters	Parenting techniques
	Parental support	Program and service awareness	Dealing with psychological distress
	Risks of technology		Readiness for family responsibilities
	Early childhood needs		Program and service awareness
	Familial conflicts		
	Program and service awareness		
Reason behind program participation	Altering negative habits	Addressing familial conflict	
	Addressing marital conflict	Skills development	
	Parental methods		
	Skills development		



Positive attitudes toward the programs	Beneficial/fun/focus on communication and technological impact on parenting	Beneficial/focused on addressing familial conflict/ as well as communication	Beneficial, focused on addressing familial conflict
Negative attitudes toward the programs	Needs to be more inclusive and broader/lacked focus on parenting adolescents	Unrealistic approach that does not take the cultural context into consideration/the program focuses on marital education and not on parenting/focus on early childhood development	Lack of awareness of family law, lack of focus on psychological basis / focus on early childhood development

## 5. DISCUSSION

The absence of parental engagement was the most apparent shared characteristic among the three programs. Whereas women have historically managed the role of primary caregivers, there is an international direction geared toward identifying the importance of involving fathers in child-rearing and parenting tasks, given the positive impact their involvement has on child development (Alemann et al., 2020). Fathers play a critical role in parenting, and they influence their children both directly and indirectly, within a much wider structure of social relationships (Lamb, 2010). As Cabrera et al. (2000) explained, father engagement can leave a direct lasting impact on the linguistic, socio-emotional, as well as cognitive development outcomes. Indirectly, fathers can promote positive attitudes in social interactions, especially those within the family unit, such as in their roles as husbands and as responsible family bearers (ibid). Fathers' involvement also influences children's physical, mental well-being, educational attainments, discipline, and gender inequality (Alemann et al., 2020). That being said, it is important to note that around the globe, various barriers exist that impede the potential role that can be played by fathers, commencing with the prevailing gender norms and beliefs that underscore the role of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caregivers (Alemann et al., 2020). Moreover, program settings are geared mainly toward women with parenting interventions designed and delivered to women, while lacking in consideration of the father's involvement (Alemann et al., 2020). Furthermore, interventions favor mothering while undervaluing co-parenting and fathering as important (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Additionally, the policy environment does not offer fathers a pathway toward supporting mothers playing their envisioned role as care providers within the family as well (ibid). For example, research has shown that fathers that take paternity leaves show increased father engagement and better-quality relationships with their children as well as healthier and more stable relationships (Petts et al., 2019). Yet, only 78 out of 167 countries across the globe offer a statutory right to paternity leave and 66 countries provide parental leave provisions, noting that these provisions are usually taken solely by women and take-up rates is considerably low by fathers (Addati et al., 2014). In the three countries studied, paternity leave prevalence differs greatly, where Jordan provides a 3-day paid paternity leave for fathers, Morocco, on the other hand, amended their labor law in 2022, increasing their paternity leave from 3 to 15 working days and Oman does not provide any paternity leave by law (Ahmad & Mir, 2021). That being said, it is critical to invest in father involvement in parenting programs by addressing key issues such as delivery format, timings, and duration and by commencing with research studies and evaluation of the key components of parenting programs across the region and study how to engage fathers in program attendance (Alemann et al., 2020).

Considering that all three programs offered information on early childhood development, the second point that merits mentioning is the lack of emphasis on parenting adolescents. This study addressed the significance of creating and executing parental education programs. It began by defining parenting education programs and outlining their significance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper-based its findings on the report undertaken by the DIFI on “Parenting Programs in the Arab Region” (2021). It aimed to tackle the importance of developing and implementing parenting education programs. It did so by first defining parenting education programs and clarifying why they matter. It then goes on to identify some research that addresses the impact of parenting education programs on various factors such as behavioral problems, child health and wellbeing, the parental balance between work and family responsibilities, parents with mental health disorders and parents of gifted children, among other factors. Finally, the paper highlights the “parenting gender gap” and addresses the importance of including fathers in the programs. It does so by analyzing three FGDs that were held in Morocco, Jordan, and Oman, presenting a geographical distribution of countries from the Arab region. The FGDs were held with program participants with the aim of understanding the viewpoints of parents on their experiences with parenting programs and whether these programs had any impact on their parenting skills and knowledge. The parents that attended all three programs were all females, and some were not married or did not have children. Parenting education programs can be delivered to women and men before actually becoming parents, and it should be noted that there are women who are interested in doing so, based on the findings. Recommendations would include the importance of parenting education program organizers to take into consideration the timing of the programs and to account for further engagement from fathers as well as working mothers. Furthermore, program organizers could collaborate with religious leaders to promote the involvement of fathers in their children’s lives during Friday prayers. Finally, policies need to be revised and enacted to provide fathers with paternity as well as parental leaves, thus promoting their involvement in the parenting process from the onset.

## Acknowledgments

This paper is entirely based on the findings of the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) report on “Parenting Programs in the Arab Region” (2021).

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