

## THE ROLE OF FATHERS IN GENDER RECOGNITION AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON GENDER BIAS CONTEXTS

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### ABSTRACT (10 PT)

This study explores the role of fathers in fostering gender recognition in early childhood within the context of gender bias. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a PRISMA-based approach, four stages were conducted: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Articles were collected from Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Scispace using keywords related to fathering patterns, gender introduction, and early childhood care. From 7,750 initial results, filtering by publication year 2022–2025, topic relevance, and inclusion criteria produced 10 core articles for analysis. The findings reveal that fathers' roles have shifted from traditional breadwinners to multidimensional figures educators, protectors, co-parents, and role models. Active and empathetic father involvement supports flexible gender identity development through play, communication, and emotional interaction. Factors such as education, culture, working hours, and communication style influence this role. The study highlights the importance of father engagement in promoting inclusive and unbiased gender understanding from early childhood.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, introducing gender to young children is still often considered taboo. Various phenomena related to gender identity mismatch are increasingly being discovered. During early childhood development, children are in a crucial period in the formation of their identity, including gender identity. The ambiguity or confusion related to gender identity and roles that often arise in adolescence and adulthood generally stems from the developmental process that occurs from an early age in the parenting patterns provided by the family. Lack of awareness about sex and gender from an early age can have a significant impact on the development of a child's identity in the future.

Sex and gender are different because sex is defined as the physical and biological aspects that a person is born with (Coxon, J., & Seal, 2021), such as male and female genitalia. In contrast, gender refers to the roles, behaviors, and expectations that are socially constructed within a particular cultural context, often categorized as masculine and feminine. For instance, males are frequently associated with traits such as strength and assertiveness, whereas females are often linked to gentleness and nurturance. From a sociocultural perspective, gender expression manifested through clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and ways of speaking—does not always reflect an individual's true identity, as individuals may feel pressured to conform to societal expectations aligned with their biological sex (Nadal, 2017). Within the family context, these social constructions of gender are not formed in isolation but are actively shaped through daily interactions, particularly through parenting practices. Fathers, as significant figures in the family, play a crucial role as agents of gender socialization. Through their behaviors, attitudes, and expectations toward their children, fathers often reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. For example, fathers may consciously or unconsciously encourage boys to adopt more “masculine” behaviors such as independence and emotional restraint, while guiding girls toward roles associated with caregiving and emotional expressiveness. These everyday interactions demonstrate how gender is continuously constructed and reproduced within the household, highlighting the importance of fathering practices in shaping children's understanding of gender roles.

The introduction of gender at an early age tends to be neglected by parents and the community because it is often considered taboo. Moreover, the involvement of fathers in introducing gender to young children is still infrequent. For example, when expressing emotions, fathers sometimes teach their sons to be strong and not to cry. Although public understanding of gender equality may have improved, the fact is that in real life, the rate of gender-based violence remains high. This is evident from the results of cases in 2021, where there were 338,506 cases of gender-based violence against women, an increase from 226,062 cases in 2020 (National Commission on Violence Against Women, 2022 in (Ni Luh Drajadi Ekaningtyas, 2023). Another fact is that the Covid-19 pandemic is cited as one of the reasons for the high rates of gender-based violence against women in 2020 and 2021.

In addition, gender gaps in the learning process still exist in several regions in various forms, such as (1) teaching materials that are generally still gender biased; (2) classroom learning processes that do not fully encourage balanced active

participation between male and female students; and (3) physical school environments that do not address the specific needs of boys and girls (Rahman et al., 2021); (Suhllpti, 2016). It has even been found that teachers tend to direct girls to play domestic roles such as cooking and babysitting, while boys are facilitated to play construction and sports.

Gender recognition actually requires a process that involves both the social environment and parenting patterns, including the involvement of fathers. Unfortunately, the patriarchal culture embraced by some Indonesian communities has prevented this role from being fully realized. Men tend to play a greater role in the public sphere, while women tend to play a greater role in the domestic sphere. As a result, Indonesia has become a fatherless country where the role or involvement of fathers in family education is still minimal (Prastiyani, 2017). This condition is still evident today, as supported by more recent national data, approximately 20.9% of Indonesian children are reported to grow up without an active father figure, either physically or emotionally (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, data from the National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) 2024 indicate that around 20.1% of children (about 15.9 million) are at risk of experiencing fatherlessness, including those who live with fathers but have very limited interaction due to long working hours (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Furthermore, only 37.17% of children aged 0–5 are raised by both parents together, highlighting the imbalance in parental involvement in early childhood care (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). These figures illustrate that the phenomenon of limited father involvement remains a significant issue in Indonesia, not only in terms of physical presence but also emotional engagement.

This condition reflects that fatherlessness is not merely about the absence of a father physically, but also about limited psychological and emotional involvement in children's development. Similar patterns can also be observed in other contexts. Interestingly, in France, there remains a significant gap in the domestic sphere related to gender recognition in early childhood. Although the amount of time parents spend with their children has increased—by more than 20 minutes per day between 1985 and 2010—this increase does not necessarily reflect equal parental roles. A national qualitative study shows that fathers in France are often positioned as “secondary parents,” indicating that their involvement in early childhood care remains limited (Sponton, 2024). Moreover, fathers' communication patterns in

guiding their children tend to reinforce gender-based expectations. For example, daughters are often directed toward fields such as language, education, or home economics, while sons are encouraged to pursue engineering and technical disciplines (Suhllpti, 2016). This reinforces persistent stereotypes, where women are perceived as weaker in mathematics and men as weaker in language. Therefore, limited father involvement in introducing gender awareness may hinder the optimal functioning of their role not only as heads of the family but also as active educators who shape children's perspectives on gender and social roles.

The interactionist approach to gender (the "Doing Gender" theory) views gender not as something that is inherent from birth or fixed, but rather as the result of a social process. This means that gender is not only about who we are, but more about what we do in our daily lives (Herbaut et al., 2025). In fact, a person's gender is not only part of their identity, but something that is continuously performed and shaped through social interactions with others. So, every time we interact, whether through the way we speak, dress, or behave, we are actually "doing" gender.

This contrasts with (Priyandanu et al., 2020), who argues that gender role socialization does not have to be done with children from an early age, but rather emphasizes the importance of instilling religious attitudes and values from an early age. This is because he believes that if children have good morals and strong religious beliefs, they will automatically know their respective gender roles. However, as a figure often associated with masculinity, the father's role in gender recognition can either reinforce or challenge gender-biased norms. Therefore, gender introduction needs to be a concern for all of us, as discriminatory treatment and inequality can cause harm and reduce the welfare of marginalized and subordinated parties (Fibrianto, 2018).

In many cultures, fathering patterns often reflect social constructs that emphasize rigid gender role divisions. Unconsciously, this can reinforce stereotypes such as boys must be tough and girls must be gentle (Aprilianti et al., 2021). In the context of gender bias, fathers' actions and attitudes play a major role in shaping children's views of themselves and others based on gender. The absence of fathers in Indonesian families is like a fire in the ashes, invisible on the surface but capable of slowly developing into a destructive problem. The introduction of gender to children influences their personality and behavior as adults, so introducing gender identity must be done appropriately because it will be stored in children's long-term memory (Dwi Handayani & Anisa, 2023). In addition Priyandanu et al., 2020);

(Sary et al., 2023), the lack of socialization related to gender roles at an early age causes new problems later in life. The side effects of parents' gender-based treatment of children are emotional disorders, rebelliousness, lack of confidence, and behavioral disorders.

This study specifically limits its scope to the role of fathers in shaping healthy gender understanding in children through daily parenting patterns. The main focus is on the contribution of fathers in promoting gender awareness free from stereotypes, as well as identifying factors that influence the role of fathers in parenting practices. Although numerous studies have examined gender socialization and parenting in early childhood, most of them tend to focus on general parenting dynamics or emphasize the dominant role of mothers. However, literature that specifically and systematically examines fathers' roles in early childhood gender recognition remains limited, particularly within patriarchal cultural contexts such as Indonesia, where caregiving responsibilities are still predominantly associated with mothers. This indicates a clear gap in both empirical and theoretical understanding regarding how fathers contribute to shaping children's gender perspectives at an early age. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by providing a focused analysis of fathers' involvement in introducing gender concepts to young children. By concentrating exclusively on fathers, this study offers a more specific contribution to the literature on parenting and gender development, which has previously been underexplored. The roles of other parties, such as mothers, the school environment, and the media, are not the subject of this study so that the analysis remains focused on the dynamics of fathering in introducing gender to young children.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using a PRISMA-based approach, consisting of four main stages, namely: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, articles were collected through systematic searches in Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Scispace databases using keywords such as "fathering patterns," "father's role," "gender introduction," and "early childhood care." This process yielded 7,750 articles. Next, the screening stage filtered articles based on publication year, namely between 2022 and 2025, leaving 3,520 articles. These articles were then further selected based on topic relevance and suitability to the research focus. At the eligibility stage, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to assess the articles more rigorously, resulting in

75 articles considered potentially relevant. However, a significant number of articles were excluded at this stage for specific reasons. Articles were excluded if they (1) did not specifically examine father-child interaction, (2) focused primarily on the role of mothers or general parenting without distinguishing paternal involvement, (3) involved children above early childhood age (over 8 years old), (4) did not address gender socialization or gender recognition, or (5) lacked empirical data and were purely opinion-based or conceptual without clear methodology. After applying these criteria, 30 articles remained for further review. At the final inclusion stage, duplicate articles were removed, and a more selective screening based on methodological quality and direct relevance to the research objectives was conducted. This process resulted in 10 articles that were considered most relevant and were analyzed in depth. The analysis was carried out by examining the patterns of argumentation, the theories used, and the main findings related to the role of fathers in gender recognition in early childhood. The following is Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection.

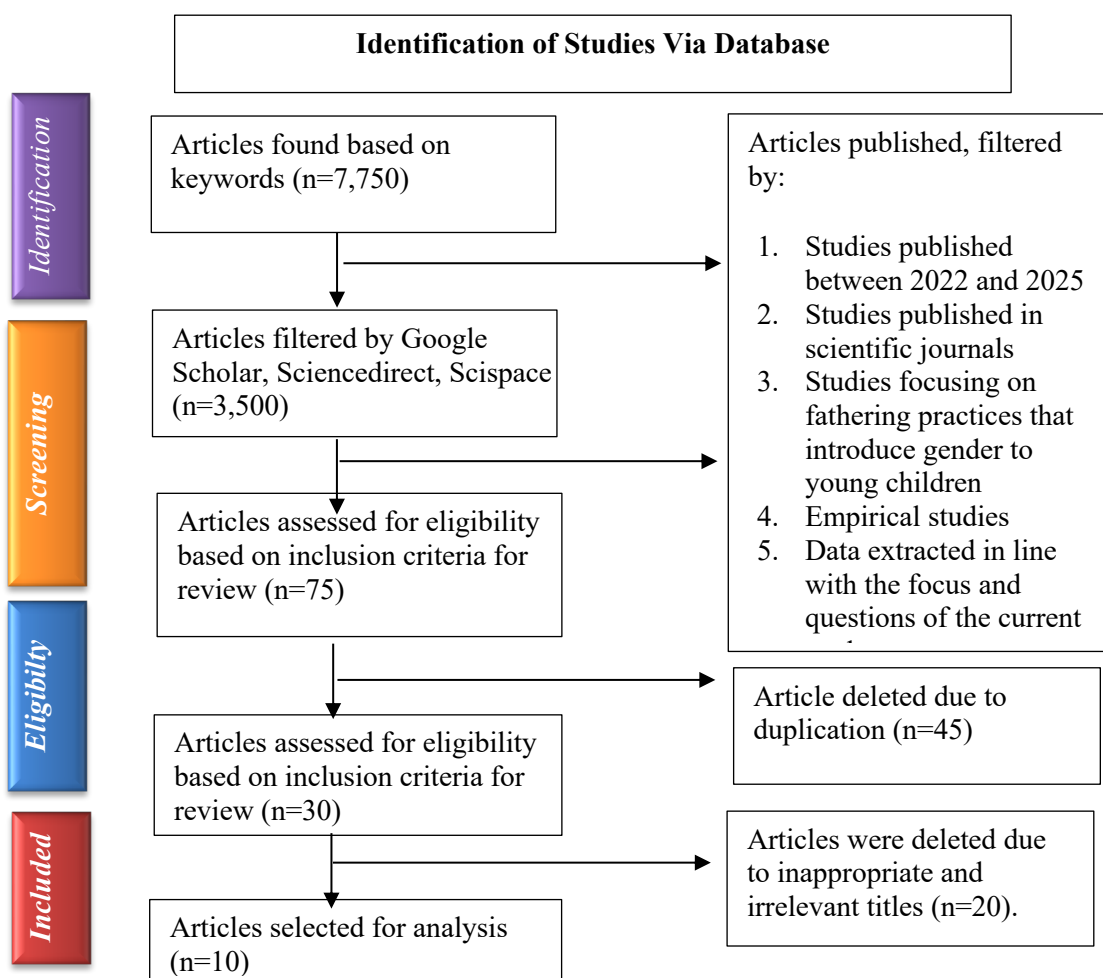


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the researchers collected 10 articles relevant to the topic of fathering patterns in gender recognition in early childhood in the context of gender bias. These articles were summarized to provide a clear picture of the main findings and their contribution to fathering patterns in gender recognition in early childhood as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Results Related to the Role of Fathers in Gender Recognition in Children Aged

No	Author/Year	Methodology	Main Findings
1	(Prastiyani, 2017), The Role of Muslim Fathers in Shaping the Gender Identity of Children in Karanganyar Village, Brontokusuman, Mergangsan, Yogyakarta	Qualitative - Qualitative Descriptive Ethnographic Approach	The results of this study show that Muslim fathers play a very influential role in shaping the identity and gender identity of children aged 6–8 years. Fathers not only function as breadwinners, but also as protectors, educators, and companions to mothers. In their interactions with their children, fathers act as confidants, role models, sources of knowledge, and disciplinarians. Factors such as educational background, culture, working hours, awareness of responsibility, cooperation with their partners, parenting knowledge, pride in their children, level of intimacy, and mental health also influence the effectiveness of these roles.
2	(Permatasari & Astana, 2025), Peran Ayah Milenial dalam Pengasuhan antara Tradisi dan Kesetaraan/ The Role of Millennial Fathers in Parenting Between Tradition and Equality	Qualitative - Library Research	There has been a significant increase in fathers' emotional and physical involvement in childcare, although role tensions remain due to persistent patriarchal pressures and inadequate policy support.
3	(Herbaut et al., 2025), Paternal involvement and children's internalization of gender roles in early childhood	Quantitative - Regression	Fathers' involvement with young children is associated with more frequent gender-inappropriate activities in boys' play, a higher frequency of activities classified as masculine, regardless of the child's gender, but not in girls' play at age 2.
4	(Fitria & Muthoharoh, 2024), Pengenalan Identitas Dan Peran Gender Pada Anak Usia Dini di Lingkungan Keluarga/	Qualitative - Case Study	The introduction of gender identity and roles can be adapted to the pre-operational concrete stage of early childhood through modeling and reinforcement through habit formation.

No.	Introduction to Gender Identity and Roles in Early Childhood in the Family Environment		
5	(Sary et al., 2023), Pentingnya Peran Orang Tua Dalam Membentuk Identitas Gender/ The Importance of Parents' Role in Shaping Gender Identity	Qualitative	Parenting practices have a significant impact on shaping gender identity in early childhood. The stages of gender identity development in children involve the introduction of male and female social roles, as well as the influence of gender stereotypes in socialization.
6	(Putra et al., 2024), Constructing Parents' Understanding To Recognize Gender Concepts In Parenting Activities Within The Family	Qualitative	The results show that effective strategies for introducing gender concepts to parents in the Central Bengkulu District community include sharing experiences in parenting education activities.
7	(Rofiah & Rachmy Diani, 2022), Pendidikan Keluarga Dalam Pengenalan Identitas dan Peran Gender Pada Anak Usia Dini/ Family Education in Introducing Gender Identity and Roles in Early Childhood	Qualitative	Gender identity recognition is adjusted to the developmental stage of early childhood, namely the preoperational stage based on Piaget's theory.
8	(Purnamasari, 2025), Mengatasi Ketimpangan Gender dengan Keterlibatan Ayah di Budaya Patriarkis Indonesia/ Addressing Gender Inequality through Father Involvement in Indonesia's Patriarchal Culture	Qualitative	The role of fathers can be a catalyst for social change if supported by education, public awareness campaigns, government policies, and collaboration with community leaders.
9	(Ardiansyah & Saqjuddin, 2025) Gender Equality In Early Childhood Education: A Literature Review Of Global Practices And Challenges,	Literature Review	Gender inequality is still evident in the representation of social roles in children's reading books, stereotypes in learning activities, and the lack of male educators in early childhood education institutions.
10	(Afifah, 2023), Netralitas Gender Terhadap Pola Asuh Anak Usia Dini Perspektif Qur'anic Parenting/ Gender in Early Childhood Parenting Patterns: A Qur'anic Parenting Perspective	Qualitative	Gender neutrality is important for shaping children's minds to be brave and confident, while remaining grounded in the values of justice in the Qur'an, so that children can express their abilities without being hindered by gender stereotypes.

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Amidst changing cultural values and demands for gender equality, the role of fathers in parenting patterns has become increasingly relevant. Recent studies show that father involvement has a significant impact on how children form their self-concept and understand their gender roles.

### 3.1 The Role of Fathers Beyond Traditional Roles

The role of fathers in the family has shifted significantly from the traditional role of breadwinner to a more complex and multidimensional role. According to research (Prastiyani, 2017), fathers' roles used to be more focused on fulfilling economic needs. However, social developments and the dynamics of modern families have encouraged fathers to take on roles as educators, protectors, companions to mothers, as well as role models and friends to their children (Permatasari & Astana, 2025); (Purnamasari, 2025). In this context, fathers' involvement is not only physical but also emotional, reflecting the need for affection and a more dominant parenting style compared to financial contributions alone.

However, this contrasts with Arifin (2019), who emphasizes the dominance of the father's role as protector and breadwinner, while involvement as a friend and playmate for children is still relatively low. In fact, father involvement in domestic and parenting activities has been proven to have a positive impact on child development, including encouraging boys to more freely explore cross-gender activities. Overseas research reveals that fathers view activities such as reading, playing, and outdoor activities as primary responsibilities that can be shared equally with mothers (Lankinen et al., 2020). Thus, it can be said that millennial fathers show increased involvement, both emotionally and physically, in child care. However, this involvement still faces challenges in the form of patriarchal cultural pressures and a lack of policy support that fully supports the role of fathers in the family. Therefore, the transformation of the role of fathers needs to be supported by structural and cultural changes in order to contribute optimally to child development and family welfare.

This transformation can be better understood through the lens of modern masculinity and involved fatherhood. Contemporary masculinity is no longer viewed as a fixed or purely dominant construct, but as a socially constructed and dynamic set of practices that can include emotional expressiveness, caregiving, and

shared domestic responsibility. In line with this, the concept of involved fatherhood emphasizes fathers' active engagement in childcare, emotional bonding, and shared parenting responsibilities, moving beyond the traditional role as sole economic providers (Day, 2020).

Social changes such as industrialization, women's increased participation in the workforce, and growing awareness of gender equality have significantly influenced the redefinition of fathers' responsibilities within contemporary families. Historically, fathers were primarily positioned as breadwinners with limited involvement in caregiving; however, modernization has led to more flexible family structures and expectations, encouraging fathers to participate directly in parenting and domestic tasks (Alemann et al., 2019). Moreover, shifting cultural norms and policy discourses promoting gender equality have further supported the emergence of more nurturing and egalitarian models of fatherhood, where emotional involvement and co-parenting are central components.

Despite these developments, structural and cultural barriers such as persistent patriarchal norms and limited institutional support continue to constrain fathers' full participation in childrearing. Therefore, reinforcing both policy level interventions and cultural shifts toward more inclusive and flexible understandings of masculinity is essential to support fathers in fulfilling their evolving roles in contemporary families.

### **3.2 Father Involvement Influences Gender Stereotypes**

Father involvement in child rearing not only impacts emotional and social development, but also plays an important role in shaping a more flexible and inclusive gender identity. Fathers who show empathy, cooperation, and active involvement in various aspects of parenting become role models that allow children to view gender roles more openly (Nabila & Andayani, 2019). Through warm and participatory interactions, children learn that men can also be caring, communicative, and involved in domestic tasks that have often been associated with women's roles.

Research in 2017 by Prastiyani confirms that activities such as reading together, playing, and discussing emotions with fathers help children understand that self-expression and empathy are not characteristics limited to one gender (Prastiyani, 2017). This contributes to the formation of children's gender identities that are non-discriminatory and more appreciative of diversity. Another study by Herbaut et al. (2025) shows that fathers' involvement in housework and childcare correlates with increased participation of boys in activities that are not bound by gender stereotypes.

Interestingly, however, fathers' interactions in the form of play can actually

reinforce children's tendencies toward activities that are considered masculine, regardless of their gender. These findings indicate that the type and quality of father-child interactions significantly influence how children understand and perform gender roles.

Further studies related to children's gender identity develop through a socialization process that occurs in the family environment, especially in the pre-operational stage (Rofiah & Rachmy Diani, 2022); (Sary et al., 2023). According to Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory, the age of three to six years is a crucial phase in the formation of gender identity. At this stage, children begin to recognize gender differences and actively adjust their behavior to prevailing social norms (Ye, 2023). Therefore, the role of parents, especially fathers, is very important in supporting the development of a healthy gender identity, as well as encouraging understanding and appreciation of gender diversity from an early age.

### **3.3 The Influence of Father's Communication Style, Both Verbal and Nonverbal**

A father's communication style also plays a role in shaping children's perceptions of gender roles. When fathers demonstrate openness, affection, and communicativeness, children learn that these characteristics are not limited to one gender (Hana & Nara, 2021). In addition, nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, eye contact, body gestures, and physical closeness strengthens the emotional bond between fathers and children. Positive nonverbal interactions create a sense of security and comfort, and support children's social and emotional development. Children who receive warm nonverbal communication from their fathers tend to have better emotional regulation and higher social interaction skills. In addition, interactions established through communication between parents and children play an important role in shaping children's mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors. Effective communication not only facilitates the socialization process, but also lays the foundation for shaping a child's character in accordance with their gender nature. Therefore, parents need to apply a communication approach that encourages children to actively talk and express themselves from an early age.

According to another study, fathers tend to be more emotionally and physically involved with their sons than with their daughters (Lankinen et al., 2020). This is due to fathers' tendency to identify with their sons, as well as a more

positive perception of the father's role in the relationship with sons. On the other hand, there are differences in fathers' verbal communication patterns based on the gender of their children. Fathers more often use complex sentences and a richer vocabulary when interacting with daughters, which results in faster language development in daughters compared to sons.

Furthermore, fathers' involvement in parenting is also influenced by mothers' attitudes. Mothers' attitudes toward fathers' motivation and ability to care for children, as well as mothers' views on gender roles, can affect fathers' level of participation (Lankinen et al., 2020). This phenomenon is known as maternal gatekeeping, which refers to mothers' behaviors that either limit or encourage fathers' involvement in parenting. When mothers provide support and encouragement, fathers' participation in childcare tends to increase significantly. Conversely, when mothers engage in gatekeeping behaviors that restrict fathers' roles, they may unintentionally reinforce gender bias by conveying to children that childcare is primarily a woman's responsibility (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023), thereby perpetuating traditional gender role stereotypes within the family and shaping children's understanding of gender roles from an early age.

### **3.4 Factors That Affect the Role of Fathers**

Based on the results of research (Fitria & Muthoharoh, 2024); (Sary et al., 2023), and (Rofiah & Rachmy Diani, 2022) collectively confirm that parenting patterns, including father involvement, play an important role in shaping the gender identity of early childhood. For this reason, parents need discussion forums and exchanges of experiences between parents, especially fathers, which have also been proven effective in strengthening understanding of gender and inclusive parenting (Putra et al., 2024).

Therefore, the Qur'anic parenting approach, which emphasizes gender neutrality, can shape children's characters to be brave and confident, while promoting justice and freedom of expression without rigid gender role restrictions (Afifah, 2023). In this context, the involvement of fathers has been proven to have a stronger influence on boys, especially in households where the main source of income comes from men (Dotti Sani, 2016). The introduction of unbiased gender identity allows children to express their abilities freely, in line with the pre-operational stage of child development (Rofiah & Rachmy Diani, 2022).

Sociodemographic factors such as socioeconomic status also have an influence, with girls showing superiority in early language development (Lankinen et al., 2020). In addition, providing access to gender-neutral toys and opportunities for cross-

gender play can increase cognitive flexibility, reduce the internalization of stereotypes, and encourage more comprehensive cognitive development (Spinner et al., 2018). Thus, parents play a major role in shaping children's gender identity through parenting practices and toy choices at home. Understanding these mechanisms is an important foundation for interventions aimed at reducing limiting gender stereotypes and supporting the formation of a more balanced identity in children.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Fathers' involvement in early childhood care plays a crucial role in shaping identity and reducing gender bias. Fathers' emotional and physical participation helps children develop inclusive attitudes without stereotypes, although its effectiveness is influenced by cultural, educational, and social structural factors. Therefore, policy support, public education, and social change are needed to promote equitable parenting, in order to develop children who are confident, empathetic, and respectful of diversity from an early age. This study confirms that fathers are not merely complementary, but key actors in gender socialization within the family, particularly within a patriarchal cultural context. These findings enrich parenting theory by demonstrating the specific role of fathers in reducing gender bias from an early age.

The implications for early childhood education include the need for active father involvement in learning activities, parenting programs, and school-family partnerships. Educators also need to implement gender-sensitive learning practices to foster balanced understanding. This study also recommends father-focused parenting programs that promote shared responsibility, emotional engagement, and awareness of gender bias, as well as address sociocultural barriers through collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers. Further research is needed to examine the long-term impact of father involvement on children's gender identity development across contexts, as well as the effectiveness of intervention programs in enhancing fathers' roles and reducing gender bias.

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