

THE ROLE OF FATHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: A RIGHTS-BASED PERSPECTIVE

*O PAPEL DOS PAIS NO DESENVOLVIMENTO INFANTIL: UMA
PERSPECTIVA BASEADA EM DIREITOS*

Hamid Patilima 

Panca Sakti Bekasi University,
Indonesia, Indonesia
hamidpatilima29773@gmail.com

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Corresponding author:

hamidpatilima29773@gmail.com



nal engagement, with a particular focus on the Global South. Indonesia serves as the focal case due to its recent legislative reforms and deeply embedded gender norms shaping caregiving roles. The paper reconceptualises fatherhood across four interrelated dimensions: emotional presence, direct caregiving, respectful dialogue, and cooperative co-parenting. It proposes evidence-based policy and practice recommendations that position fathers as active, equal partners in nurturing and safeguarding young children. By integrating the CRC's normative principles with Indonesia's legal and cultural context, the study addresses a critical gap in Southeast Asian scholarship, where fatherhood is seldom examined through a rights-based lens. This conceptual contribution bridges legal, cultural, and policy domains, offering a framework for gender-transformative parenting and affirming that every child is entitled to balanced, nurturing care from both parents. The findings hold implications for policy reform, programme design, and advocacy aimed at strengthening child rights and promoting gender equity in early childhood governance.

Keywords: fatherhood. child rights. early childhood. Indonesia. parenting.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a evolução do papel dos pais no desenvolvimento da primeira infância a partir de uma perspectiva de direitos da criança. Fundamentado na Convenção das Nações Unidas sobre os Direitos da Criança (CRC)—especialmente nos Artigos 5, 18 e 27—desafia o estereótipo persistente dos pais como meros provedores financeiros. Utilizando uma abordagem analítico-normativa, a pesquisa examina criticamente instrumentos jurídicos internacionais, literatura acadêmica e relatórios institucionais para identificar barreiras socioculturais e políticas ao envolvimento paterno, com foco especial no Sul Global. A Indonésia é destacada como estudo de caso devido às recentes reformas legislativas e normas de gênero profundamente enraizadas que moldam os papéis de cuidado. O artigo reconceitua a paternidade em quatro dimensões inter-relacionadas: presença emocional, cuidado direto, diálogo respeitoso e coparentalidade cooperativa. Propõe recomendações políticas e práticas baseadas em evidências que posicionam os pais como parceiros ativos e iguais no cuidado e proteção de crianças pequenas. Ao integrar os princípios normativos da CRC ao contexto jurídico e cultural da Indonésia, o estudo aborda uma lacuna crítica na produção acadêmica do Sudeste Asiático, onde a paternidade raramente é examinada sob uma ótica baseada em direitos. Esta contribuição conceitual conecta domínios jurídicos, culturais e políticos, oferecendo um referencial para a parentalidade transformadora de gênero e reafirmando que toda criança tem direito a cuidados equilibrados e afetivos de ambos os pais. Os resultados apresentam implicações para reformas de políticas, desenho de programas e ações de advocacia voltadas ao fortalecimento dos direitos da criança e à promoção da equidade de gênero na governança da primeira infância.

Palavras-chave: paternidade. direitos da criança. primeira infância. Indonésia. parentalidade.

1. Introduction

For decades, dominant constructions of fatherhood have framed men primarily as economic providers (Kanji, 2017; Poeze, 2019), overlooking their broader caregiving capacities. This reductive view obscures the diverse roles fathers can—and should—fulfil in the early lives of children. A substantial body of research now affirms that engaged fathering contributes significantly to children’s emotional security, cognitive growth, and social competence (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Diniz et al., 2021).

Yet, despite this growing evidence, many societies — including Indonesia — continue to marginalise fathers in caregiving. Gendered cultural norms, legal ambiguities, and institutional inertia often confine paternal roles to the periphery (Barcala-Delgado, 2025; Osborne, 2024). These constraints are especially pronounced in the Global South, where patriarchal traditions remain deeply entrenched despite sustained advocacy for gender equality and child-centred governance.

This article repositions fatherhood within academic and policy discourse through a rights-based framework. It asserts that children are entitled to nurturing care, emotional support, and guidance from both parents, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly Articles 5, 18, and 27. By embedding the CRC’s core principles—non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, and the right to parental care—into discussions of fatherhood, this study reframes paternal involvement as both a legal obligation and a moral imperative rather than a discretionary role.

The study makes a novel contribution by bridging normative legal analysis and policy discourse in the Global South. It offers a child-centred lens on fatherhood that remains underexplored in rights-based scholarship, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. Drawing on legal instruments, international frameworks, and peer-reviewed literature—including Indonesia’s Law No. 4 of 2024 on the Welfare of Mothers and Children in the First One Thousand Days of Life, empirical studies on father engagement (Jeong, 2024; Martinez & Fagan, 2021), and global reviews on gender-transformative parenting (Fatherhood Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b)—the analysis situates fatherhood within both legal mandates and socio-cultural realities.

Indonesia serves as a compelling case study due to its evolving legal landscape, active civil society movements, and persistent patriarchal structures that shape caregiving roles. The next section outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guide this inquiry, laying the foundation for a reconceptualisation of

fatherhood as an essential component of equitable, child-centred societies.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the normative framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), with particular emphasis on Articles 5, 18, and 27. Collectively, these provisions affirm the child's right to parental care, survival, and development, while prioritising the child's best interests. Article 5 recognises the evolving capacities of the child and the parental role in providing appropriate guidance, as elaborated in General Comment No. 5 (2003). Article 18 obliges states to ensure that both parents share responsibility for the child's upbringing. Article 27 affirms the child's right to an adequate standard of living necessary for full development (UNCRC, 1989; United Nations, 1989).

Building on this foundation, the analysis draws on General Comment No. 18 (2014), which asserts that caregiving is not inherently maternal and calls for dismantling legal, institutional, and cultural barriers—such as workplace discrimination and entrenched gender stereotypes—that limit father involvement (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2025). This principle is especially relevant in Indonesia, where caregiving roles are shaped by overlapping systems of legal pluralism and persistent sociocultural norms.

The framework also incorporates Michael Lamb's tripartite model of father involvement, which categorises paternal roles into three domains: engagement (direct interaction with the child), accessibility (physical and emotional availability), and responsibility (decision-making and provision of resources). While widely applied in research, this model has been critiqued for underemphasising socio-cultural influences in non-Western contexts. This study addresses such limitations by situating paternal involvement within Indonesia's specific legal, institutional, and cultural environment (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Jeong, 2024).

In addition, global literature on gender-transformative parenting highlights the role of public policy, early childhood systems, and advocacy initiatives in enabling equitable father engagement (Fatherhood Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b; Barcala-Delgado, 2025; Martinez & Fagan, 2021; Osborne, 2024; UNICEF, 2021). These studies emphasise the need for intersectoral policy action that places the child's best interests at the centre of legal, educational, and family domains. The analysis also considers how caregiving norms intersect with class, labour market conditions, and cultural identity in shaping fatherhood.

Finally, gender studies—particularly feminist theory and critical masculinity

studies—provide essential tools for interrogating patriarchal constructs that restrict male participation in caregiving. Scholars such as Kanji (2017), Poeze (2019), and Selbervik (2013) illustrate how structural norms reinforce gendered hierarchies. In Indonesia, where traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, these perspectives offer crucial insights into the socio-legal constraints affecting paternal engagement.

Together, these interdisciplinary perspectives establish the analytical foundation for the study's methodology and policy critique. They also guide the criteria for assessing legal texts, policy instruments, and scholarly literature in the sections that follow.

3. Methodology

This study employs a normative-analytical methodology to examine the rights-based construction of fatherhood in early childhood policy and practice. Rather than generating primary data, it undertakes a structured interpretation of legal texts, policy frameworks, and peer-reviewed literature to assess how paternal involvement is conceptualised, constrained, and potentially transformed through child rights norms—particularly within the Indonesian context.

At the core of this approach is legal document analysis, focusing on international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its General Comments—specifically Nos. 5 (2003), 7 (2005), 13 (2011), 18 (2014), and 25 (2021)—alongside national instruments including Indonesia's Law No. 4 of 2024 on the Welfare of Mothers and Children in the First One Thousand Days of Life. These sources are evaluated through the CRC's foundational principles: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child (Lundy, 2007; UNCRC, 1989). The analysis examines how these principles are codified into legal mandates and implemented through governance mechanisms at national and sub-national levels, with attention to coherence, enforceability, and contextual adaptation.

In parallel, qualitative content analysis synthesises insights from academic literature and institutional reports on paternal involvement, caregiving norms, and gender-transformative parenting. Literature is selected purposively, prioritising peer-reviewed, high-quality sources that are contextually relevant to the Global South and aligned with rights-based frameworks. This includes Scopus-indexed journals and publications from authoritative bodies such as UNICEF, OECD, and WHO. Thematic coding is guided by relevance to child rights principles and the evolving

discourse on equitable, shared parenting.

To interrogate systemic factors influencing paternal roles, the study integrates critical policy analysis using Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR) approach (2009), complemented by governance analysis from Birkland (2019). The WPR approach reveals how policy narratives construct and constrain acceptable forms of fatherhood, while governance analysis provides insight into institutional arrangements and policy implementation dynamics. Together, these tools enable an integrated examination of both formal policy objectives and the underlying discursive and structural frameworks that shape them.

Indonesia is selected as a compelling case study due to its combination of recent legislative reforms, vibrant civil society advocacy, and persistent patriarchal norms. Legal developments in areas such as parental leave, child protection, and gender equality in family life create a dynamic policy environment in which constructions of fatherhood can be critically observed and analysed.

While the study does not collect empirical data, it makes a substantive contribution through its triangulated conceptual critique. The absence of direct stakeholder perspectives is acknowledged; however, this is offset by the integration of legal, academic, and institutional sources, which enhances analytical rigour, credibility, and theoretical relevance for academic, legal, and policy audiences.

This methodological design responds to scholarly calls—articulated by UNICEF, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and leading child rights theorists—to move beyond descriptive accounts toward transformative scholarship that informs systemic change. It affirms caregiving as a collective social responsibility and reinforces the principle that children are autonomous rights-holders entitled to nurturing, engaged relationships with both parents.

Although reliance on secondary data represents a limitation, this is mitigated by the breadth, depth, and triangulation of documentary materials reviewed, providing a robust foundation for advancing rights-based policy discourse on fatherhood in the Indonesian and broader Global South context.

4. Cultural and Social Contexts of Fatherhood in Indonesia

4.1 Religious and Traditional Narratives

In Indonesia, cultural narratives have historically elevated the maternal role in nurturing and emotional care while positioning fathers primarily as financial providers and moral authorities. These dichotomies are reinforced by religious interpretations that emphasise male leadership within the family, often without an equivalent emphasis on emotional or caregiving responsibilities. For instance, Islamic teachings frequently cited in Indonesian contexts highlight the father's duty to provide materially, yet are less often interpreted to include the affective and nurturing dimensions of parenting (Poeze, 2019; Jeong, 2024).

Ethnic traditions—such as those in Javanese, Batak, and Minangkabau communities—commonly allocate parental responsibilities along gendered lines, reducing paternal visibility in daily caregiving routines. Harkness, Super, & Keefer (1992) note that such culturally embedded gender roles across Southeast Asia limit the fluid sharing of parenting duties. Left unchallenged, these norms hinder the fulfilment of children's rights as outlined in Article 18 of the CRC. General Comment No. 7 further reinforces the principle that both parents share responsibility for their child's upbringing.

4.2 Media and Policy Representations

Media portrayals and public policy in Indonesia continue to reinforce archetypal images of distant or authoritarian fathers. These depictions shape collective expectations and often legitimise paternal disengagement. The Fatherhood Institute (2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b) documents how global and local media tend to marginalise nurturing fatherhood narratives, thereby sustaining narrow definitions of masculinity.

At the policy level, Indonesian labour and welfare frameworks still lack comprehensive provisions to support paternal involvement. For example, the Labour Law No. 13/2003 does not mandate adequate paternity leave. Similarly, the 2024 Law on Maternal and Child Welfare makes only limited reference to fathers beyond their economic role (Government of Indonesia, 2024). These policy gaps, identified by Panter-Brick et al. (2014) and Adamsons & Johnson (2013), constitute systemic

obstacles to equitable parenting and fail to operationalise the spirit of CRC Articles 5 and 18, which require states to respect and support parental roles in the child's best interests.

A rights-based approach, guided by General Comment No. 18, offers a pathway to shifting these narratives toward more inclusive understandings of fatherhood. However, translating these recommendations into cohesive national frameworks remains fragmented and underfunded, reflecting broader inertia in child-sensitive governance. Comparative experiences from the Philippines and Malaysia reveal similar policy and cultural challenges, pointing to a regional need for harmonised strategies that foreground the caregiving role of fathers.

4.3 Lived Experiences of Indonesian Fathers

Despite cultural and institutional constraints, many Indonesian fathers express a strong desire to engage more fully in their children's lives. However, they face significant barriers including inflexible work schedules, lack of paid parental leave, and minimal social support networks. Barcala-Delgado (2025) finds that workplace gender norms in low-income contexts restrict paternal involvement, a finding echoed in Indonesian studies by Ansari & Gershoff (2016) and Jeong (2024).

According to the 2022 Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS), fewer than 30% of fathers reported daily involvement in their child's play or early learning activities (BKKBN, Statistics Indonesia, 2023). Some fathers have increased participation in emotional development, education, and play, but their contributions are often undervalued in family settings and overlooked in policy frameworks. Craig & Churchill (2021) observes that post-pandemic shifts have exacerbated parenting inequalities, with digital divides and shifting role expectations disproportionately affecting fathers.

These realities underscore the urgency of mainstreaming gender-sensitive, child rights-based policies in early childhood governance. Such measures are essential to uphold children's rights to protection, participation, and development (UNICEF, 2021; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Diniz et al., 2021; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020). As enshrined in CRC Articles 18 and 27—and reinforced by General Comment No. 18—children are entitled to the care and guidance of both parents, as well as living conditions that foster holistic development, including the presence of an engaged father. Practical implementation can draw from Southeast Asian pilot programmes that promote active fatherhood.

4.4 Synthesis

The cultural, structural, and experiential dimensions of fatherhood in Indonesia reveal how paternal roles are shaped by intersecting systems of belief, policy, and lived reality. A rights-based reconceptualisation must address institutional barriers alongside sociocultural narratives that limit paternal potential. Without tackling both domains, policy reforms risk reinforcing existing inequities rather than dismantling them.

5. Rethinking Fatherhood through a Child Rights Lens

5.1 Applying CRC Principles to Fatherhood

Applying a child rights framework reframes fatherhood beyond traditional roles of provision and authority, centring on what children are entitled to—emotional security, participatory play, and respectful relationships (Jones, 2023; Mateos, 2023). Article 18 of the CRC recognises the shared responsibilities of both parents, while Articles 5, 3, and 27 reinforce parental guidance, the primacy of the child’s best interests, and the right to an adequate standard of living for full development.

General Comment No. 18 (CRC/C/GC/18, 2016) expands on these provisions, emphasising gender equality in caregiving. General Comment No. 7 (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, 2005) underscores the importance of responsive caregiving in early childhood. In Indonesia, these normative standards remain largely aspirational; policies and social structures often fail to support shared caregiving. As Livingstone & Sylwander (2025) notes, rights-based frameworks re-centre children’s needs in both digital and offline parenting contexts, aligning with calls to redefine fatherhood in ways that prioritise children’s evolving needs (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Diniz et al., 2021; Amato, 2000).

While parenting practices are evolving, this transformation requires systemic enablers at policy and community levels.

Tabela 1: CRC Articles and Implications for Fatherhood

CRC Article	Child's Right	Implication for Fathers
Article 5	Parental guidance and evolving capacities	Engage in responsive, age-appropriate care
Article 18	Shared parental responsibilities	Serve as co-primary caregivers
Article 27	Adequate standard of living for development	Contribute beyond material provision
GC No. 18	Gender equality in caregiving	Remove legal and cultural barriers

Source: Author's synthesis based on the UNCRC and General Comments.

5.2 Transforming Parenting Practices

A rights-based approach recognises fathers as co-primary caregivers, encompassing active participation in caregiving routines, empathetic communication, and consistent emotional presence (Gershoff, 2013; Jones, 2023; Diniz et al., 2021). Research supports these roles: Nielsen (2011) demonstrates that shared parenting post-divorce improves child mental health, Adamsons & Johnson (2013) find that involved fathering reduces behavioural risks and fosters resilience, and Amodia-Bidakowska (2020) highlights the developmental benefits of father-child play.

Gender-equitable parenting programmes—such as those from the Fatherhood Institute (2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b) and MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign—show that structural support is critical for transformative change. In Indonesia, the Generasi Ayah Hebat initiative (Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, 2023) has begun promoting paternal involvement through parenting classes and media campaigns. These align with the CRC's emphasis on nurturing care and parental engagement (UNCRC, 1989; UNICEF, 2020).

As Jeong (2024) argues, robust measurement of paternal involvement across diverse contexts is vital for equity in early childhood. Yet, national strategies often fail to link fatherhood with protection from neglect and developmental deprivation (Selbervik, 2013; UNICEF, 2020).

5.3 Enabling Conditions: Policy and Community Support

Transformative fatherhood depends on enabling environments: inclusive policies, flexible work arrangements, and cultural acceptance of male nurturing roles. Key measures include father-focused parenting programmes, comprehensive paternity leave, and public campaigns normalising active fatherhood (Barcala-Delgado, 2025; Twamley, 2013).

Indonesia's Law No. 4/2024 represents progress, but effective implementation requires community-based strategies, enforcement mechanisms, and robust monitoring (Government of Indonesia, 2024). The 2021 VAC Survey by UNICEF Indonesia reports persistently low paternal involvement, calling for integrated, context-sensitive support systems (UNICEF Indonesia, 2021). Cultural norms across Asia, as noted by Rathi (2024), continue to restrict fathers' roles, making cultural reorientation essential. Osborne (2024) and Gordon et al. (2012) highlight the value of systemic support, while Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020) and Lee (2023) emphasise the need for adaptive policies in digital parenting.

Comparative insights from Southeast Asia reveal common barriers. In Thailand and Vietnam, legal frameworks remain fragmented despite grassroots advocacy. Malaysia has introduced limited paternity leave but lacks nationwide campaigns to promote father engagement. These cases underscore the need for harmonised regional strategies aligned with CRC obligations.

5.4. Synthesis

Reframing fatherhood through a child rights lens is more than rhetorical—it is a systemic mandate for legal reform, institutional alignment, and cultural transformation. Nurturing fatherhood is not aspirational; it is a right, grounded in CRC obligations and integral to achieving SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16.2 (ending all forms of violence against children).

Achieving this vision requires dismantling institutional and cultural barriers, embedding inclusive caregiving norms into national frameworks, and ensuring that all children benefit from responsive, gender-equitable parenting—regardless of their parents' gender.

6. Reflections and Implications

6.1 Impact on Children and Families

A substantial body of research confirms that children with engaged fathers demonstrate stronger emotional regulation, enhanced cognitive development, and greater school readiness (Amato, 2000; Jones, 2023; Nielsen, 2011). Secure attachments with fathers are linked to long-term socioemotional well-being, while consistent paternal involvement fosters a sense of safety and belonging (Panter-Brick et al. 2014; Osborne, 2024). Active fathering is also associated with improved behavioural outcomes, reduced aggression, and enhanced socioemotional competence (Martinez & Fagan, 2021; Gershoff, 2013).

Beyond benefits to children, shared parenting contributes to gender equity within households by modelling cooperative caregiving and challenging patriarchal assumptions about gender roles (Diniz et al., 2021; Kanji, 2017). This dynamic strengthens parental relationships, reduces stress, and promotes emotional reciprocity (Feinberg, 2003; Twamley, 2013). As Held (2006) argues, equitable caregiving enhances not only child outcomes but also societal resilience. Moreover, research indicates that engaged fatherhood correlates with lower rates of child neglect and improved maternal mental health, positioning paternal involvement as essential within comprehensive family support systems (OECD, 2022).

6.2 Relevance for Policy and Education

These findings have significant implications for public policy, professional training, and national strategies aimed at advancing child and family welfare. Embedding a rights-based understanding of fatherhood within early childhood systems can reduce gender disparities and promote holistic child development.

Current national data reveal a pronounced implementation gap: while over 60% of Indonesian fathers express a desire to engage in caregiving, only 12% have accessed paternity leave (BPS, 2023). This gap reflects rigid workplace policies and entrenched norms that frame caregiving as primarily maternal. Addressing these barriers requires integrated, cross-sectoral reforms institutionalised as rights-based commitments.

Tabela 2: Key Policy Areas and Recommended Interventions for Father-Inclusive Practices

Policy Area	Recommended Intervention
Early Childhood Education	Embed father-inclusive strategies in parenting curricula and teacher training programmes
Labour and Social Policy	Ensure equitable access to paid paternity leave and support flexible caregiving arrangements
Public Health	Provide psychosocial and emotional support for fathers during the perinatal and early childhood periods

Source: Adapted from UNCRC (1989), General Comments No. 7 & 18, UNICEF (2021), Fatherhood Institute (2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

These reforms should be viewed not as optional enhancements, but as legal obligations under the CRC (UNCRC, 1989). General Comments No. 7 and 18 clarify that nurturing paternal engagement is integral to fulfilling a child’s right to care. Promoting father involvement is therefore a structural commitment to children’s rights, requiring measurable, enforceable actions across state institutions.

Embedding these reforms into national systems aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3.2 (reducing preventable child mortality), SDG 4.2 (ensuring quality early childhood development), and SDG 5.4 (recognising unpaid caregiving and promoting shared responsibility in families). These objectives reinforce the need for inclusive and transformative family policies grounded in dignity, equality, and co-parenting (UNICEF, 2021; Fatherhood Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

Failure to integrate fathers into caregiving perpetuates systemic inequities, undermining child development, family stability, and gender equality. Rights-based fatherhood is thus a normative imperative—central to dismantling intergenerational disadvantage and ensuring that every child grows up in a nurturing, equitable, and co-responsible family environment.

Conclusion

The evolution of fatherhood is not simply a cultural shift—it represents a normative transformation grounded in the rights and best interests of the child. Policies and institutional frameworks must progress beyond rhetorical commitments to actively dismantle structural and cultural barriers that limit equitable paternal

involvement in caregiving. A rights-based redefinition of fatherhood offers a pathway toward societies that are inclusive, nurturing, and resilient.

Framing fatherhood within a justice and child rights paradigm—as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and General Comment No. 18—affirms that every child is entitled to care, affection, and the emotional presence of both parents. Achieving this vision requires restructuring public systems that sustain gendered caregiving divisions. It calls for sustained policy measures, from embedding father-inclusive pedagogies in early childhood curricula to expanding paternity leave provisions and integrating psychosocial support for fathers into public health services (UNICEF, 2021; Fatherhood Institute, 2022).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that engaged fatherhood enhances children’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioural outcomes Panter-Brick et al. (2014). Aligning fatherhood reforms with the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality)—ensures these changes are measurable, sustainable, and impactful across generations. The ethics of care, as described by Held (2006), underscores that equitable caregiving is both a civic duty and a moral imperative.

Recognising fathers as emotionally capable, nurturing agents reframes caregiving as a shared societal responsibility and a cornerstone of democratic, inclusive communities. This redefinition is not merely about transforming family roles—it is about rebuilding the foundations of justice, equality, and intergenerational solidarity.

This article offers a conceptual synthesis that bridges legal frameworks, empirical research, and caregiving practices, providing a child rights-based roadmap for transformative fatherhood policies. Transforming fatherhood is not only instrumental to improving child outcomes—it is a structural necessity for advancing children’s rights, achieving gender equity, and cultivating caregiving cultures rooted in dignity and shared responsibility.

To realise this vision, coordinated, cross-sectoral action is essential—rooted in robust evidence, upheld by legal mandates, and guided by the principle that engaged fatherhood benefits all. Policymakers, educators, and health professionals must institutionalise father-inclusive frameworks as legal and ethical imperatives, ensuring that caregiving is recognised, supported, and shared—irrespective of gender.

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Author Biography

Dr Hamid Patilima is a lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Panca Sakti Bekasi University, Indonesia. His academic work focuses on child rights policy, father-inclusive caregiving, and equitable early learning. He actively engages in national and international collaborations to strengthen child protection systems and has published on trauma-informed pedagogy, gender-responsive parenting, and digital childhoods in the Global South.