



## การตัดสินใจแสดงบทบาทการเป็นบิดาของวัยรุ่นมุสลิมไทย: การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ

### Decision to Take on a Father's Role of Thai-Muslim Adolescents: A Qualitative Study

ชญาณันท์ อึ้งวงษ์พัฒน์<sup>1\*</sup>, ประณีต ส่องวัฒนา<sup>1</sup>  
Chayanan Uengwongsapat<sup>1\*</sup>, Praneed Songwathana<sup>1</sup>

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการตัดสินใจแสดงบทบาทการเป็นบิดาวัยรุ่นไทยมุสลิมช่วงพัฒนาบทบาทของการเป็นบิดาครั้งแรก ผู้ให้ข้อมูลเป็นวัยรุ่นไทยมุสลิมที่เป็นบิดาครั้งแรก จำนวน 14 ราย อายุ 16 ถึง 19 ปี และอาศัยอยู่กับภรรยาอย่างน้อย 6 เดือน เก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกและสังเกตแบบไม่มีส่วนร่วมและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงเนื้อหา

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การตัดสินใจแสดงบทบาทการเป็นบิดาเป็นประสบการณ์ช่วงเปลี่ยนผ่านจากความรู้สึกกังวลไปสู่การมีความสุขในการรับบทบาท โดยมีปัจจัยสนับสนุน 2 ประการที่สำคัญ คือ คำสอนของศาสนาอิสลามและแบบอย่างการเป็นบิดาของผู้ให้ข้อมูล ปัจจัยเหล่านี้สามารถสนับสนุนการเป็นบิดาในช่วงเปลี่ยนผ่านได้อย่างมาก โดยเริ่มจาก “การยอมรับการเป็นบิดาและเผชิญหน้ากับมัน” จนนำไปสู่ “การแบกภาระ ความรับผิดชอบ และการเป็นบิดาอย่างมีความสุข”

ศาสนาและการมีตัวแบบในครอบครัวเป็นปัจจัยที่มีความสำคัญในการช่วยเหลือให้บิดาวัยรุ่นไทยมุสลิมมั่นใจในการแสดงบทบาทใหม่ในครอบครัว ผลการศึกษาเหล่านี้สามารถช่วยให้บุคลากรด้านสุขภาพพัฒนากลไกสนับสนุนบิดาวัยรุ่นในการแสดงบทบาทบิดาได้เหมาะสม

**คำสำคัญ:** บิดาวัยรุ่น, บทบาทการเป็นบิดา, คำสอนศาสนาอิสลาม, การมีตัวแบบ, การเปลี่ยนผ่านการเป็นบิดา

<sup>1</sup> คณะพยาบาลศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตหาดใหญ่

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus

\* Corresponding Author: chayanan.u@psu.ac.th



## Abstract

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed to investigate the key factors of the decision-making process of Thai-Muslim adolescents in taking on the role of father for the first-time.

**Methods:** A total of 14 participants who were Thai-Muslim first-time fathers aged 16 to 19 years and lived with their wife for at least six months. The data were collected with in-depth interviews and non-participant observation and analyzed using content analysis.

Results found that the decision to adopt the fathering role was perceived as a movement from 'worry' to 'happiness', and was supported primarily by two main factors: *Islamic teachings* and *Father as a role model*. These factors enabled a true significant changeover, and the adolescent father's role began to shift from 'Accepting the onset of pending fatherhood and trying to confront it' to 'Shouldering the burdens, responsibilities and joys of fatherhood'

Both religious beliefs and family role models are important in helping Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers build confidence in their new family roles. These findings can help healthcare professionals to develop support mechanisms to allow adolescent fathers to perform their roles.

**Keywords:** Adolescent father, Father's role, Islamic teachings, Role models, Transition to fatherhood

## Introduction

The role of father is a fundamental and essential aspect of a man's life, involving the creation of a paternal identity and actions based on the child's needs (Hockenberry et al., 2022). A recent review and meta-analysis reported that mal-adjustment to the role of father and negative coping was identified in approximately 10 % of 20,728 men in the first month following childbirth, with a further increase in the 3 - 6 months postpartum period (Rao et al., 2020). Early fatherhood constitutes a difficult coping for adolescents with unplanned pregnancy. It leads to different roles and tasks to be fulfilled during adolescence. A previous study on Thai adolescent first-time fathers reported that they experienced role conflict and felt fatherhood to be a burden (Uengwongsapat et al., 2018).

Adolescent fathers typically struggle with the transition to fatherhood because they are dealing with two problems at the same time: being an adolescent and becoming a father. These circumstances can cause stress and conflict between being both an adolescent and a father (Davidson



et al., 2020) These dual roles are constantly at odds: adolescent fathers must deal with both fatherhood and the normal developmental path of adolescence. The father's role, on the other hand, necessitates time and energy to focus on childcare activities and responsibilities (Lowdermilk et al., 2019). In addition, adolescent fathers must build their role identity through an interactional and developmental process that occurs over time between fathers and children in order to successfully make the transition to fatherhood (Martins, 2019). However, fathers who do not receive adequate support may ignore their responsibility for child rearing and leave their wives to care for the children alone (Márquez et al., 2019)

In Thailand, Muslims are a fast-growing group within the population demographics. Pattani province is one of the three southern Thailand where Muslims are the majority population. The cultural and social values are often grounded with Islamic beliefs (Pattani Province office, 2018). In Thai-Muslim societies, families are characterized by a definition of parental role, where the mother is responsible for raising children and maintaining the household, whilst the father has a role as financial breadwinner. Progressively, fathers have assumed a more active role supporting their wives during pregnancy and childbirth (Ubaidillah et al., 2024). Muslim fathers are responsible for leading the family with social and spiritual leadership, while mothers take care of practical family needs (Astuti et al., 2021). In addition, being married in an Islam community is regarded as one of the important functions of the family and is the legal form of extending the family with children. Parents must be caring and love their children and are accountable for raising them and ensuring their education (Sumari et al., 2021).

Recently, the Thai economy has been rapidly growing and this may increase the burdens for Thai adolescents who become a father, particularly those with economic problems and unreadiness. Many adolescents experience drop-out from the society, drop out of school, or are unemployed. Some adolescents are employed with low-wage jobs, such as fishermen or factory workers. These adolescents rely mostly on their families and live on an insufficient income (Pattani Province Office, 2018). Moreover, stress and conflict between being both an adolescent and a father are found in those adolescents. There are limited studies about how Muslim adolescent first-time fathers experience and view their roles in Thailand, and how their Islamic faith or Thai-Muslim culture could possibly influence or aid in this transition. Therefore, knowledge learnt from Thai-Muslim adolescent first-time



fathers of significance in helping them adapt to the new role. Nurses are one of the key persons who can facilitate them to overcome this transition period.

### Theoretical Frameworks

There are three theoretical viewpoints applied on exploring the transition to parenting among Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers. First, Parental Role Theory by Belsky (1984) suggests that parenting quality is determined by a combination of individual and contextual factors. This idea helps Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers understand how their background and experiences impact their parenting behaviors. Second, Social Support Theory by Cobb (1976) proposed that social support networks play a critical role in assisting people in managing stressful life situations. The transition of Thai-Muslim adolescents into fatherhood can be aided by the support of their peers, family and community. Lastly, Cultural Identity Theory by Phinney (1992) explained that people explore, commit to, and form attitudes toward their cultural group as they create their cultural identities. This idea sheds light on how Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers manage their multiple identities as both Muslim and Thai. Table 1 summarizes the important themes and their significance for Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers from several theoretical viewpoints.

**Table 1** Theoretical framework diagrams

Theories	Key Concepts	Relevance to Thai-Muslim Adolescent Fathers
<i>Parental Role Theory</i>	Parenting influenced by individual characteristics and contextual factors	Upbringing and personal experiences shape parenting behaviors.
<i>Social Support Theory</i>	Support networks	Family, peer, and community support facilitate transition to fatherhood.
<i>Cultural Identity Theory</i>	Cultural identity development	Navigating dual identities as Thai-Muslims and fathers.

**Note:** Adapted from the theoretical framework proposed in the study.



The theoretical framework used to guide this study included sociological and cultural theories to investigate the factors influencing Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers' roles and duties as they transition into fatherhood. Each hypothesis gives a lens through which to understand the many components of the fatherhood transition process.

### **Objectives**

The core objective of this study was to explore factors that influence the decision in taking a father's role of Thai-Muslim adolescents in the first six months after the birth of their child.

### **Research methodology**

This study was part of a previous study which described the creation of the conceptual model in the first stages of becoming a father (Uengwongsapat & Songwathana, 2023). A descriptive qualitative design with in-depth interviews and non-participant observation was used.

#### **Participants and the setting**

The participants in this study constituted the same group of adolescent fathers from the previously published qualitative research (Uengwongsapat & Songwathana, 2023). Fourteen Thai-Muslim first-time father adolescents were approached and followed up for six months after birth of their children. The participants were recruited and introduced by nurses at the maternity department of Pattani Hospital between March 2019 and October 2020. The inclusion criteria required the participants to be a Muslim male adolescent between 15 and 19 years old, to speak Thai, have a first child born after 37 weeks of gestation, to have lived with wife for at least 6 months, and to be willing to participate in the study. Participants who were interested in participating were screened to examine eligibility.

#### **Ethical consideration**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Prince of Songkla University (psu.pn.1 – 008 / 61) on 18th January 2019 and the Research Ethics Committee of Pattani Hospital (011 / 2562) on 23rd April 2019. The aim and method of data collection of this study were explained both in the invitation letter and verbally to the participants. Participation was voluntary and the participants could withdraw from the study without having to give any explanation. Participants



over the age of 18 signed the consent form to participate, while those under the age of 18 were given forms to be signed by their parents or guardians. Participants were assured that data would be kept strictly confidential and used solely for research. The participants' names were replaced with reference numbers in the interview transcripts. The quotations used in this study refer to the participant's interview number; participant number 1 was label as (P1) and so forth.

### **Data collection**

The interviews began at a mutually agreed time and place at the participant's preference. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that served as a guide to the interview process. Initially, the interviewer began the interview by introducing herself. Then, initial interview questions were used in this study: 'Please tell me about your experiences in becoming a father?' 'Please tell me when you began feeling like you were a father?' During this interview, the interviewer encouraged the participant to clarify and elaborate his experience by using probing questions. For example 'That is very interesting; please tell me more about...'. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and field notes of behavioral observations taken. The duration of the individual interviews was between 40 and 60 minutes. Of the 14 participants, six were interviewed twice, and eight participants were interviewed three times until the data reached saturation. The second interview was held around three to four days after the first interview and the same timeframe was applied after the second interview. The interview process continued until no new data emerged. Participants were repeating ideas that had emerged previously. To achieve data saturation in the current study, the interviewer interviewed a total of 14 participants.

### **Data analysis**

Data were analyzed using content analysis, as described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). First, each transcript was read and reread, until it was fully understood. Next, 'meaning units', which are words, statements and paragraphs in each transcript reflecting the core meaning of the participants' replies, were identified. Lastly, differences and similarities between the codes were linked and compared.

### **Trustworthiness**

The research team (CU, PS) included researchers with extensive experience and training in qualitative research methods. The interviewer (CU) was a female and academic nurse with experience



in qualitative interview techniques. The principles proposed by Guba (1981) such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability helped to establish trustworthiness. To assess credibility in this study, the interviewer (CU) built a rapport and trust with each participant by spending time with them. The participant was informed about the role of the interviewer. The data collection and simultaneous data analysis covered a 19-month period. Six participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information in understanding the experiences. The member checking with these six individuals debated the inclusion of content, compared the similarities or differences, and discussed the early stages of category formation. The participants confirmed the final themes were relevant to the adolescents' main issues and underlying experiences. To assess dependability, all interview transcripts were analyzed by other researchers with experience in qualitative data analysis. Confirmability in this study refers to the maintenance of objectivity. The findings must reflect the participants' voice and not the researcher's biases. To increase transferability, participants' details and the study context were explained in detail to enable the readers to decide about using the results in their intended setting (Elo et al., 2014)

## Results

### The participant's characteristics

In total, there were 14 Thai-Muslim first-time fathers, age ranging from 16 to 19 years of age (Table 2). Three had planned pregnancies and eleven had unplanned pregnancies. Eleven participants were working, while three of them were students. Twelve participants lived in an extended family, four with their parent's families and the other eight with their wife's families, during pregnancy.

**Table 2** Demographics of Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers

Characteristics	Participants (n=14)
<b>Father's Age (years)</b>	
16	2
17	1
18	5
19	6



Characteristics	Participants (n=14)
<b>Education</b>	
Primary school	3
Secondary school	8
Diploma	3
<b>Occupation</b>	
Student	3
Self-employed	2
Full-time employed	9
<b>Income (Thai Baht/day)</b>	
100	2
250-300	9
450-500	3
<b>Intention to have a baby</b>	
Planned	3
Unplanned	11
<b>Family living</b>	
Parents and children living alone	2
Living with their own parents	4
Living with the wife's parents	8
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married before pregnancy	2
Married during pregnancy	12

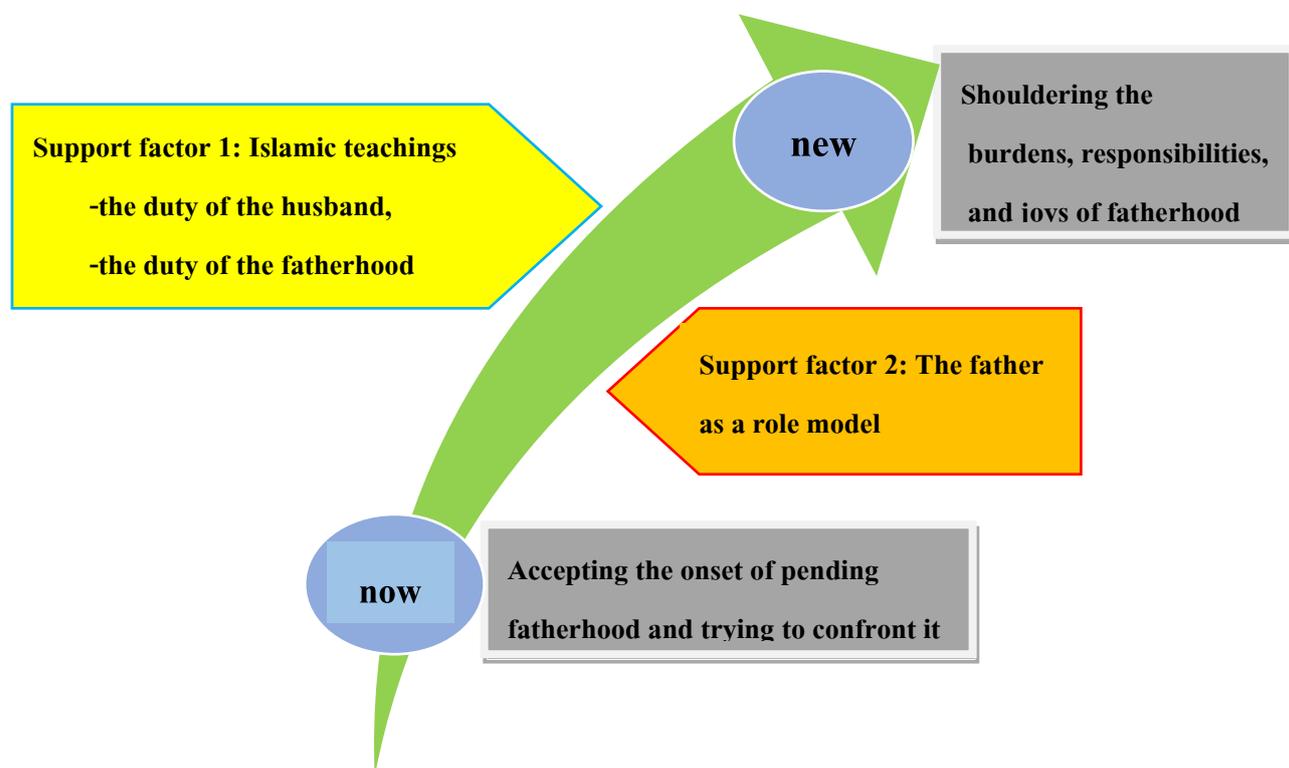
Content analysis provided new insights into the factors facilitating the adolescents' decisions in the transition from a childless and carefree adolescent to a responsible father. New insights about decision on taking a father role was coded. Their experiences started from the current (adolescent) to a new position (father) by describing two support factors, namely Islamic teachings and their father as a role model.

#### **Factors supporting transition of being a fatherhood**

Religious dogma, in general, influences Thais' social practices. First-time Muslim adolescent fathers relied on Muslim principles. The categories *Islamic Teachings* (Support 1) and *The Father as*



a *Role Model* (Support 2) supported the transition from the current (now) to the new position as a new father (Figure 1)



**Figure 1** Factors supporting becoming a first-time father of Thai-Muslim adolescent

*Support factor 1: Islamic teachings*

Within the category of *Islamic teachings*, two teachings were identified: “the duty of the husband” and “the duty of fatherhood.”

Overall, the fathers sought guidance from Muslim beliefs during their transition period. Muslim people believe that ending suffering is to accept first that this belongs to daily life. The participants in this study adhered to Islamic principles to accept the fact that their wives were pregnant. They were better prepared to face challenges during their wives’ pregnancies and becoming a father because they accepted that truth. Dual duties were identified as part of life in the Muslim perspective.



### The duty of the husband

The duty of the husband and father in Islam is heavily emphasized, with the husband and father being responsible for supporting his wife and children, providing love and security, living a good life and ensuring a happy family. In Islamic teachings, a man supporting his family should know that a woman is also a human being, as a few participants described as:

*“Although my wife had an unplanned pregnancy but I also know the duties of a good husband for my family. Regarding the Islamic teachings that are prescribed and taught to Muslims in the mosque. I must take good care of my wife.” (P14)*

*“I was a child and studied in a seminary school, The duties of a husband are always taught in seminary schools and mosques. I must act as a good husband when the opportunity arises.” (P9)*

Either a woman or a man has rights of freedom and life. In a Muslim marriage the husband and wife have the obligation to satisfy the human desires. With the blessings of Allah, parents can have children who support them when aging. These core values of a Muslim family have been expressed by a participant who mentioned how he learned about these values:

*“When I was young and until now, I have to pray 5 times per day and go to the mosque every Friday in the afternoon. I learned about the duties of a man when married, husband's duty in the family, which is contained in the Islamic dogma. I was indoctrinated about good husband's duties.” (P1)*

In the daily life of Muslims, religious leaders taught about marital commitment in the mosque. The content of these values shared by religious leaders are about the first-time father's new duties when becoming a husband taking care of his wife. These values are also about the responsibilities and roles of being married as well as being parents taking care of the children. Some adolescent fathers mentioned their experiences when visiting the mosque:

*“Before my Islamic marriage, I and my wife must train about the duties of a good husband, a good wife, caring for our family, caring for my wife. This class is in a mosque for a full day, I think it is okay for our new family. I promise myself to care for wife.” (P4)*



### The duty of fatherhood

For Thai-Muslim, caring for a child is a responsibility that Allah entrusts to parents. Moreover, this is a mission to support the child to become a good person, behaving well, and being humble. As two participants reflected:

*“I have a duty to do my best, to be a good husband, to be a good father. for my family I have been taught since I was a child.” (P2)*

*“I think Allah entrusts me to be a good father. I try to support my child and my family.” (P8)*

A father is a person who is accountable to Allah. Children, according to Islam, are entrusted to Allah. God has given it to us as a gift. Fathers and mothers are in charge of the child’s upbringing and creating a positive family environment. Fathers should be a good role model for their children and give them a good name. They wish for their child to grow up to be a good Muslim, as one participant said:

*“Supporting my child is a duty along with Islamic worship such as reciting Qur’an, fasting and including respecting Allah’s creations. So, I have to do my best for my family.” (P11)*

In addition, a number of participants explained more on the father’s duty. Allah requires the father and mother to change for the better during pregnancy. The father should encourage his pregnant wife to eat healthy foods, read the Qur'an, and touch and talk to the unborn child. Muslim fathers must prioritize the care of their pregnant wives.

*“Of course, my baby is a gift from God. My baby will grow up to be a good Muslim. I encourage my wife to eat healthy foods, read the Qur'an and talk to the unborn child in the womb. Now that my child is born. I support my wife and raise my child as I can. I think that I can do everything for my child’s happiness.” (P6)*

#### *Support factor2: Father as a role model*

When the expectant fathers accepted their wives’ pregnancy, they changed themselves to adopt the role of father like their own father, as expressed by a participant:

*“When I was a boy, I saw my father praying 5 times in house per day. My father took care of my brother when my mother was sick or busy and cleaned the house both outside and inside. He never complained to my mother. Now I am a teen father and I try to act like my father.” (P13)*



The participants began to recognize the emergence of new life and began to focus more on the baby and the mother. Witnessing the change in the mother's body and feeling the fetal movements helped transform the father's attitudes. As the pregnancies progressed, the selfish and immature thoughts of returning to a carefree adolescence gave way, to be replaced by an acceptance of the new role as an expectant father. As adolescents and first-time fathers, the participants in this study faced enormous challenges: how to care for the newborn, how to acquire and save money to raise it, and how to educate the child and plan its future. They must take care of their child and wife in the same way as their own father, such as one participant mentioned:

*"I will do everything the same to my father. My father worked hard. He did a lot of things in the house, such as washing clothes and cooking rice for children. I can be just like my father. Oh, I have to raise my child and work at the same time. I have to take care of my wife and child the same to my father." (P7)*

For physical care, all expectant fathers were eager to learn about holding the newborn, bathing, and changing diapers for their beloved babies. Of the 14 participants, 12 participants were living in extended families, eight lived with their pregnant wives' parents while the remaining four lived with their own parents. The participants in this study had strong family support networks built in from either their own or their wife's family, and in some cases both. The support would come from both parents and older siblings. They obtained support, particularly from the adolescent father's family, such as acceptance, assistance in resolving problems, child-rearing, and so on. It was found that the father of the participant played an important role to assist the adolescent father in becoming confident in his role as a new father by acting as a mentor to transfer knowledge and skills of fatherhood. While in the hospital's postpartum units, some adolescent fathers received tutoring from their fathers, learning by observing, remembering, and attempting until the adolescent father developed confidence. One of expectant fathers described:

*"My father also took my child to shower, and I took the knowledge from there. Then my father taught me how to hold the baby, and then he showed it to me. I'm glad to have a father who can taught me how to take care of my child." (P5)*



*“My father taught me how to raise my child, taught me everything about child-rearing, taught me how to be a good father and set a good role model for my child. Your child will be proud.”*  
(P10)

## Discussion

The findings shed light on factors that influence and shape the father’s role of Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers in the first six months after birth of their child. Two main factors that facilitate their decision to take a father’s role have been uniquely shown. Thinking of Islamic teachings was one of the factors that the participants reported that it helped to confront difficulties during the transition to fatherhood. In Islam, the duty of the husband is being the leader in the family. It is the responsibility of the husband to provide the basic needs to his wife and children. This was consistent with Uengwongsapat et al. (2018), who reported that the Buddha's teachings can be a useful adjunct in assisting Buddhist fathers in making this difficult transition. Thus, cultural and religion lenses could be helpful for the first-time Thai adolescent father in dealing with the new position and coping with the new roles. Similarly, a previous study in Western culture, such as in South African families, emphasized the importance of culture in shaping fathers’ roles (Ncayiyane & Nel, 2024). One of the most important responsibilities of parents is to provide their children with worldly and religious knowledge. These factors that influence adolescent fathers' transition may also play a role in shaping fathers' transition among Thai-Muslims.

The journey into Thai-Muslim fatherhood has not been easy for these participants. Some of them do not have support or resources to help them handle the demands of fatherhood. Most adolescent fathers reported that their fathers acted as a role model and supported them throughout their transition process. This assistance enabled them to successfully transition to fatherhood gradually and to support their wives. The most valuable sources of support came from their fathers. This is consistent with Short et al. (2023), who reported that continued support from fathers was very important in the successful transition from adolescence to fatherhood. Similarly, Bamishigbin et al. (2019) found that both the adolescent fathers and their children felt empowered when the fathers felt supported by their families. Moreover, most expectant fathers sought out their families for emotional support, childcare assistance, financial support, and childrearing advice. This finding was consistent



with Makhavhu et al. (2023) who interviewed 5 African young adult fathers aged 18 - 25. They felt unready to have children. The lack of parental support was one of the challenges adolescent fathers experienced during their transition. All these reasons are consistent with the study of Uengwongsapat (2022) claiming that the family is a source of social support that can change the way to encounter stress. Adolescent fathers' well-being is an important component of health as it affects family function and has long term implications for their child's health.

### **Conclusions**

Fatherhood is a significant event for Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers who are learning to integrate their Islamic identities and paternal responsibilities during the transition period. Findings from this study highlight the factors of Thai-Muslim first-time fathers in performing their roles to support their wives and the children. Islamic teachings and the father as a role model are factors supporting the transition when these fathers accepted the onset of pending fatherhood. A better understanding of these experiences will enable healthcare professionals to support Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers and their families. The findings can support healthcare professionals and policy makers to develop supportive mechanisms to allow Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers to perform their roles based on the family's needs. These support mechanisms should facilitate the profound transition in the continuity of more responsive and mature young Muslim families.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of the study is that it gathered data only from low-income Thai-Muslim adolescents, and all lived in Pattani province. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. Moreover, the recruitment could not specify those who have no support from significant others and might not be transferable beyond this group or other Muslim communities with limited family resources. A further limitation is the timeframe of the interviews, up to six months after birth. This might limit the understanding of the long-term experiences of being a father after birth.



### Implications and contribution

The findings of this study can be considered a reference for healthcare professionals and policy makers to develop support mechanisms to allow Thai-Muslim adolescent fathers to perform their roles based on the family's needs. Support mechanisms should facilitate this profound transition in the continuity of care in the community.

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