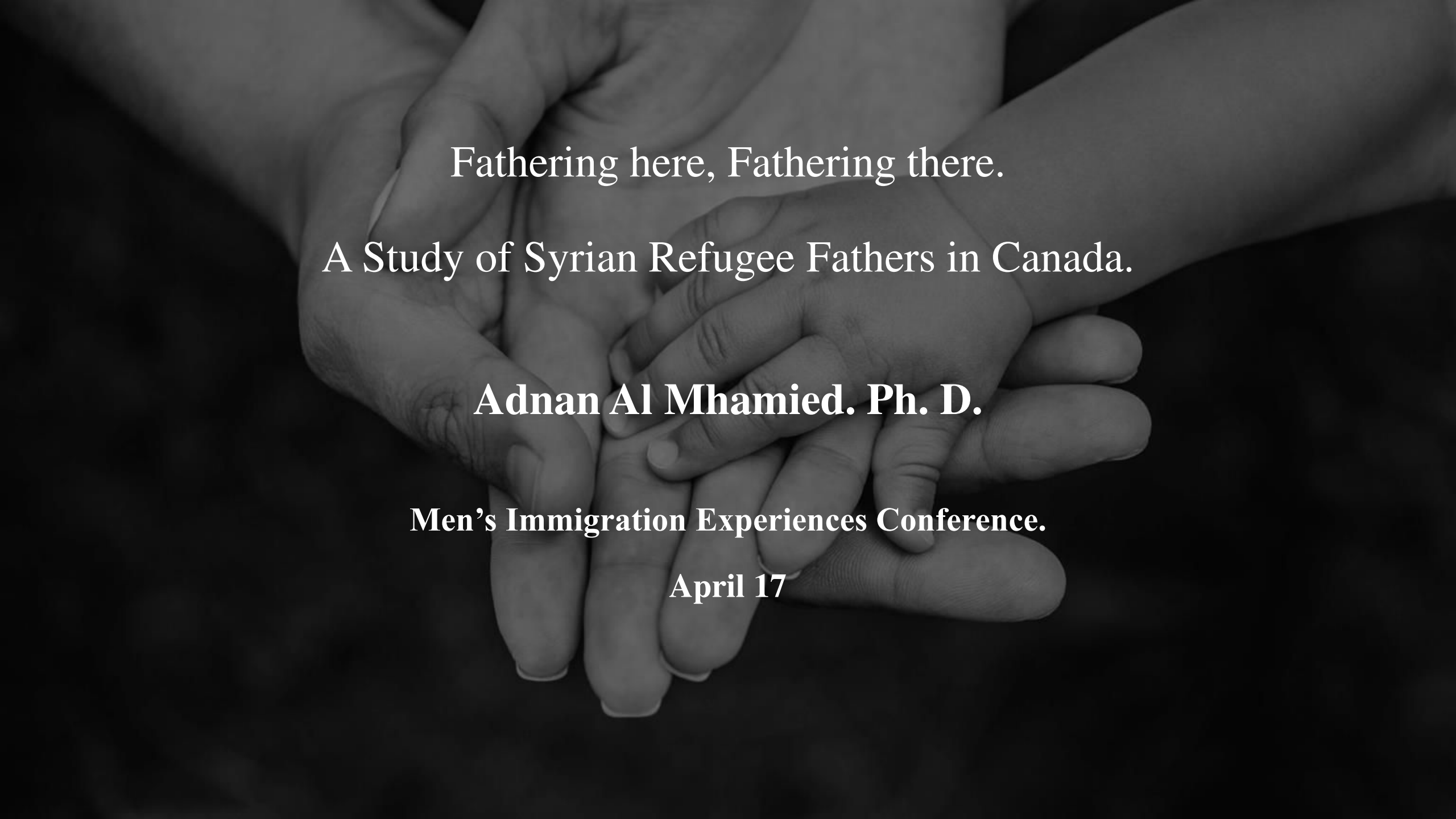


Fathering here, Fathering there.

A Study of Syrian Refugee Fathers in Canada.

Adnan Al Mhamied. Ph. D.

Men's Immigration Experiences Conference.

April 17

Outlines

- What is this research about?
- Data collection.
- Some findings.
- Discussion and conclusions

What is this research about?

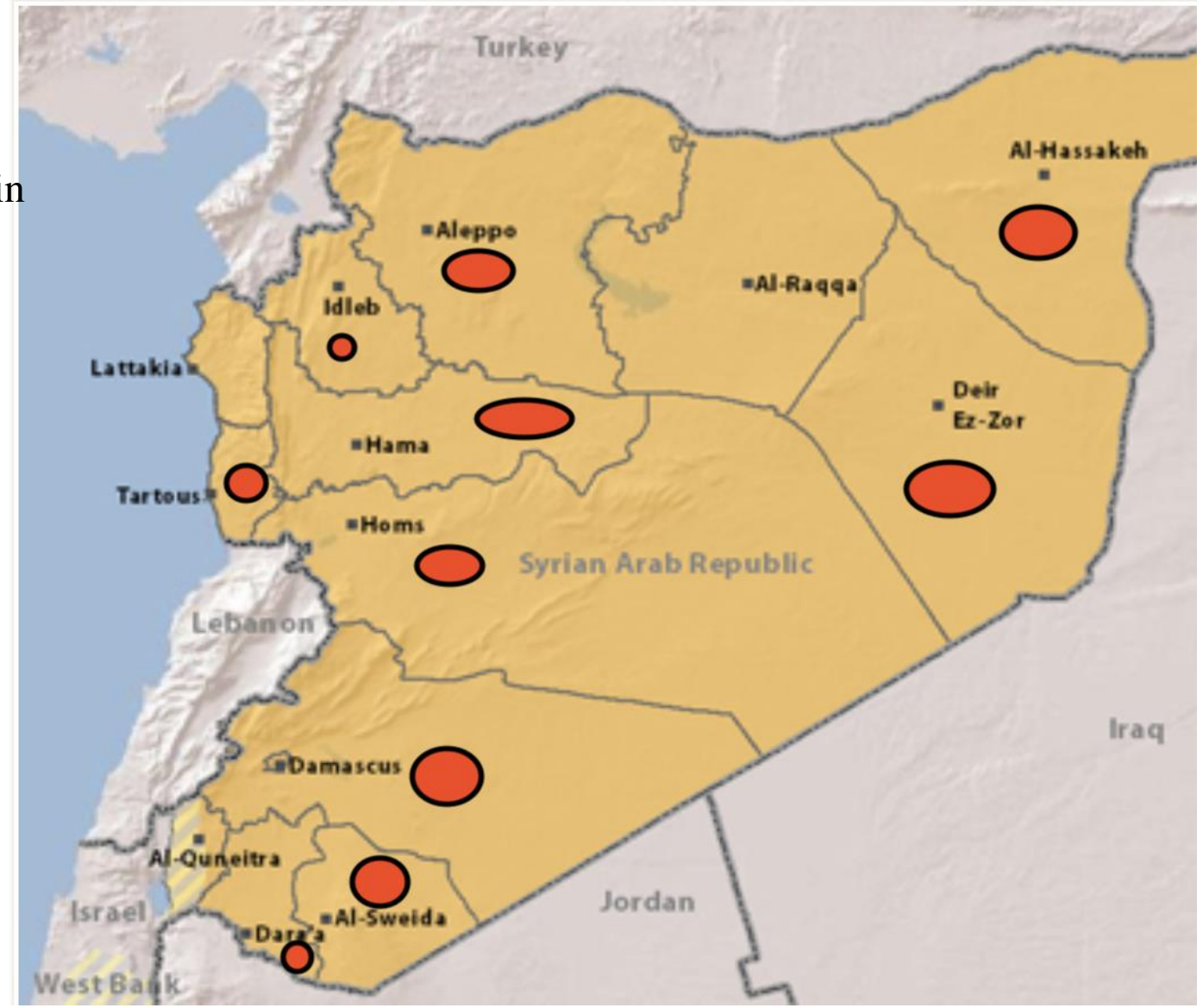
My research research explores the meanings of fatherhood for Syrian refugee fathers throughout their migration and resettlement journeys.

Research Design.

- **Sources of data**
  - In depth semi-structured interviews (by telephone, WhatsApp, Zoom)
    - 2 interviews with each participant
      - 1st: Sociodemographic information, transition, and migration journey
      - 2nd Definitions and perceptions of fatherhood, meanings of fatherhood in country of origin, how men learn to become fathers according to their culture, fathering practices and difficulties of fathering during the migration journey.
      - Also: Definitions and perceptions of motherhood.
      - Perception of Canadian fatherhood.

Participants

Cities of origin in Syria



Source: Screen shot from the International Red Cross website

Research Participants.

- 17 Syrian fathers (resettled refugees)
  - *GARs =8, PSRs = 9*
- Sunni Muslims (n= 13), Christian (n=2), Druze (n=1), Ismaili (n=1)
  - Culturally Arab *(n*=15), Kurdish (*n*=1), Armenian (*n*=1)
- Age range of fathers = 31 to 63 years
- Married at time of interview (n=15)
- Number of children (range : 1 - 7)
- Child age (range: 1 month - 29 years)

Research Design.

- **Data collection**
  - Recruitment from across Canada:
    - Participants from the SyRIA.Ith research project (November 2020 through January 2021)
    - Recruitment messages in Arabic via WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, gatekeepers, and Syrian community members who spontaneously offered their support (January 2021 through March 2021)
  - Purposeful sampling (inclusion criteria):
    - Syrian male 18 years and over with a forced migration experience.
    - Experience of living in a transitional country before resettling in Canada.
    - Resettled in Canada through one of the resettlement programs, that is Governmental Assisted Refugee (GAR), Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR), or Blended Visa -Office Referred Refugees (BVOR).
    - Immigrated to Canada as a result of the current Syrian war and at least 2 years prior to the date of the interview so that they have had time to accumulate some experience as a father in Canada; and
    - Experienced fatherhood before arrival in Canada and is still engaged in fathering practices on a daily basis.

Fatherhood in Syria.

- Religion as influential to Syrian Fatherhood.
  - Fatherhood as a community modelling.
- Fathering is intertwined with Al Rujoulah (الرجولة).
- Being a father in the context of Syria:
  - *The main provider.*
  - *The backbone of the family*
  - *The head of the household.*
  - *Father's responsibility.*
- Fatherhood as a push factor.

Fatherhood in transition

- . Living in limbo.
  - The lost/ forgotten father
  - The survival fatherhood
  - Limited fathering
  - Vulnerability

Fatherhood in Canada

A resettled refugee, unsettled father.

Leading from Behind.

The new father

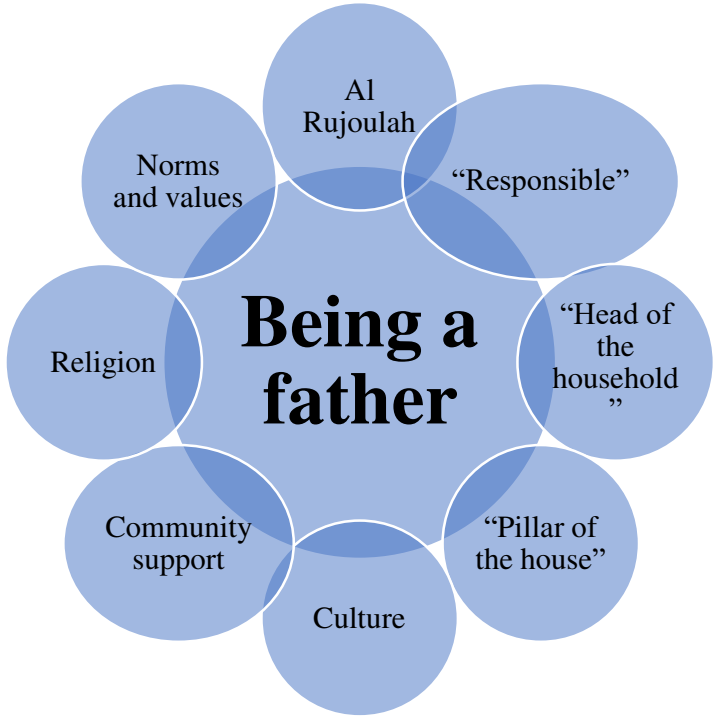
- Hyper fatherhood
- Adjusted fatherhood

Differences in fathering

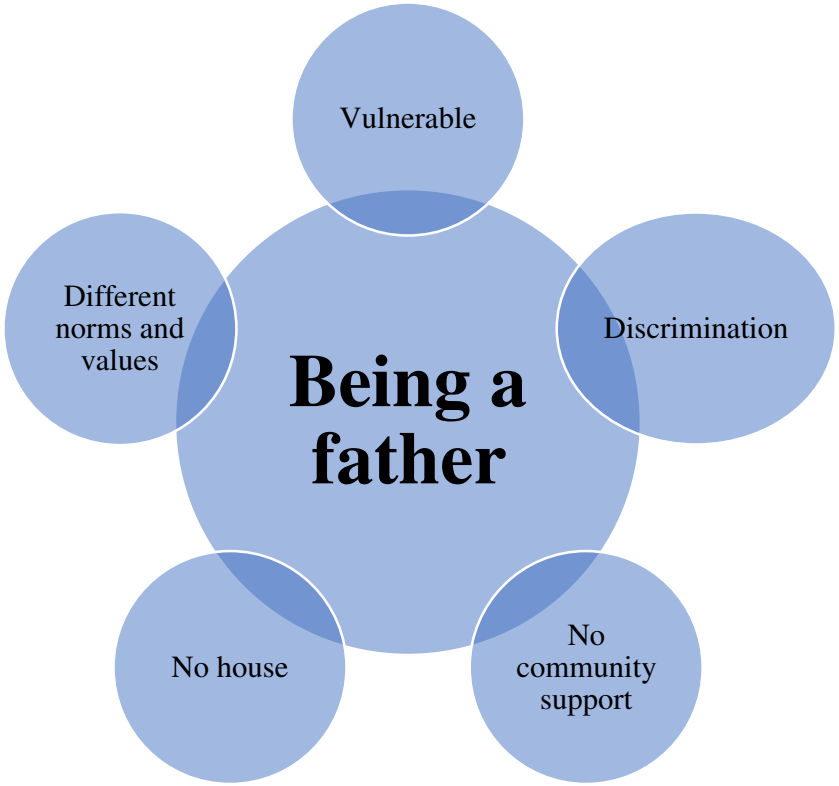
- Children's age
- Children's gender.

Challenges

- Lack of social support.



In Syria



In transition

In Canada

- “I grew up in one of the well-known neighbourhoods in Damascus, and as in any other Syrian environment, it was important what being a man and manhood meant. Men should grow up in an Islamic environment. Our example [role model] in that is our Prophet, the Messenger of God, he told us pray as you saw me praying, so we have to follow the Muhammadiyah school in our daily lives, including the way we act as fathers”. (Fawaz, Father of 5).
- “Our cultural background is rooted in our Islamic belief. And this is what define fathers and their roles in our society” (Muhammad, father of 4).
- “It is the transition from being a husband to a father… for me, I was part of the Orthodox Youth movement in Damascus. Priests taught us many things about social life, religion, and other things. These Christian movements had a huge impact on who we are as individuals, as men, and as a father. (Anas, father of 2).
- “The father is the bond of the house and the family; he works hard to ensure that the children have a meaningful and dignified life. (Bassel, Father of 1).

Definitions of Mothers

- The Queen of the House.
- A role model.
- Shared responsibility.
- Source of love, care and affection.
- Motherhood as a complement to fatherhood.
- Mothers as “spring”, source of compassion.
- Prepare the children to be responsible.
- Motherhood as a community modeling.

- “In Syria, and more specifically in Damascus, the woman is the crown of the house, she is the queen, she is the minister, she is the one who gives tenderness, kindness, shines, organizes and runs the household.”

(Fawaz)

- “If the father is the backbone the mother is the body, she is the real body of the household, she is the one who’s responsible for taking care of the kids, educating them, feeding them and providing kindness. Since men are working most of the time, she has a big role because she spends more time with the kids”. (Khaldoun)
- Being a mother is the same as being a father. She has to be committed socially and religiously to her family, be a role model, guide the children, so they can grow up perfectly as the parents want them to be according to the norms and traditions. (Fadi)
- “She shares with the father his responsibilities toward the children. She dedicates her time and efforts for the sake of the children” (Siry).

Recommendations

- Better understanding of the meaning of being a father and the role of fathers.
- Any interventions with refugee families should recognize the importance and the role of fathers in the wellbeing of these families.
- Working with refugee families requires gender-based analysis plus, by measuring the impact of forced migration and settlement on parenting practices, family relationships, family dynamics, and family wellbeing.
- Parenting is a sensitive issue especially among racialized people.
- Programs that promote father's involvement, especially those with young children.
- Peer support initiatives.
- More bridging and bonding with other fathers.
- This is an invitation to think about the way we design the places we offer our service.