



# SHOW QUALITATIVE STUDY: EFFECT OF FATHER'S CLUBS ON MEN'S CARE WORK AT HOME

Plan International's Father's Clubs interventions engage young and adult men through a peer-to-peer approach to become active partners of change. Men who are or will become fathers, were trained as community role models and champions promoting more gender justice-oriented versions of manhood. The Father's Clubs Manual on *Engaging Men in Maternal, Newborn, and Child health and Sexual and Reproductive Health (MNCH/SRH)* was developed for the Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW<sup>1</sup>) Program by Promundo, with technical guidance from Plan International Canada and support from Global Affairs Canada. The Father's Club manual was launched as part of a core gender-transformative strategy within the SHOW program.

The program was designed and implemented as a direct and targeted response to the need for concrete strategies and action steps to engage men in active fatherhood from pregnancy until early childhood. The facilitators used an evidence-informed curriculum designed and adapted from a kin program of Promundo's. It takes a gender-transformative approach by engaging participants in actively questioning what it means to be a man or a woman in society and in challenging inequitable gender norms and power imbalances.

The focus of the curriculum is MNCH/SRH,<sup>2</sup> but there are also sessions on joint household decision-making, women's right to make household decisions, conflict resolution, challenging harmful practices including gender-based violence and more equitable division of household labor. The different activity-based sessions encouraged the development of solutions for common challenges that men face while participating in domestic chores. The curriculum was rolled-out, through a cascade training plan, in all five SHOW countries by organizing men into Father's Clubs.

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1. Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) is a 4.5 year Global Affairs Canada funded multi-country, maternal newborn child health (MNCH)/sexual and reproductive health (SRH), gender transformative program that is implemented in targeted, remote and underserved regions of five countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria and Senegal
2. Maternal newborn child health (MNCH)/sexual and reproductive health (SRH)

In early 2019, Plan International carried out qualitative research extrapolating men's, partner's and adolescent children's, as well as community member's experiences with the Father's Clubs in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti and Nigeria. These groups were asked a series of questions to investigate and triangulate their different experiences and perspectives on any changes in fathers' participation in unpaid domestic activities. The key findings below provide a gist of the critical reflections challenging gender norms and also provides an additional evidence-base around men's equitable care giving. The case studies at the end offer an in-depth view of research participants on the effects of Fathers' Club training.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Across all four study countries, the majority of study respondents noted that **men and women have the same capabilities to take on household chores** and childcare and that men should play an active role in sharing the division. Majority of women expressed that **men should be helping women with household chores and child care**.
- Generally, most respondents noted **good fathers will spend time with their children and treat girls and boys equally**. Majority of adolescents believe good fathers should love their children, show affection, and spend more time at home. As well, a large number of adolescents mentioned **the importance of shared decision making as a family** rather than the father always making decisions.
- **Women noticed a number of changes in their husbands:** assisting with chores, especially during pregnancy, less conflict between partners, less alcohol consumption, better communication between partners, fathers spending time with children and joint decision making.
- Fathers believe they should be **friendly with their children and treat their sons and daughters equally**. There is a general "theme of **love and education**" to be more affectionate and support their children's studies.
- Women shared that there is **more joy in their relationships with their partners and they get along better**, as well, there is **more discussion** and **shared decision-making** power.



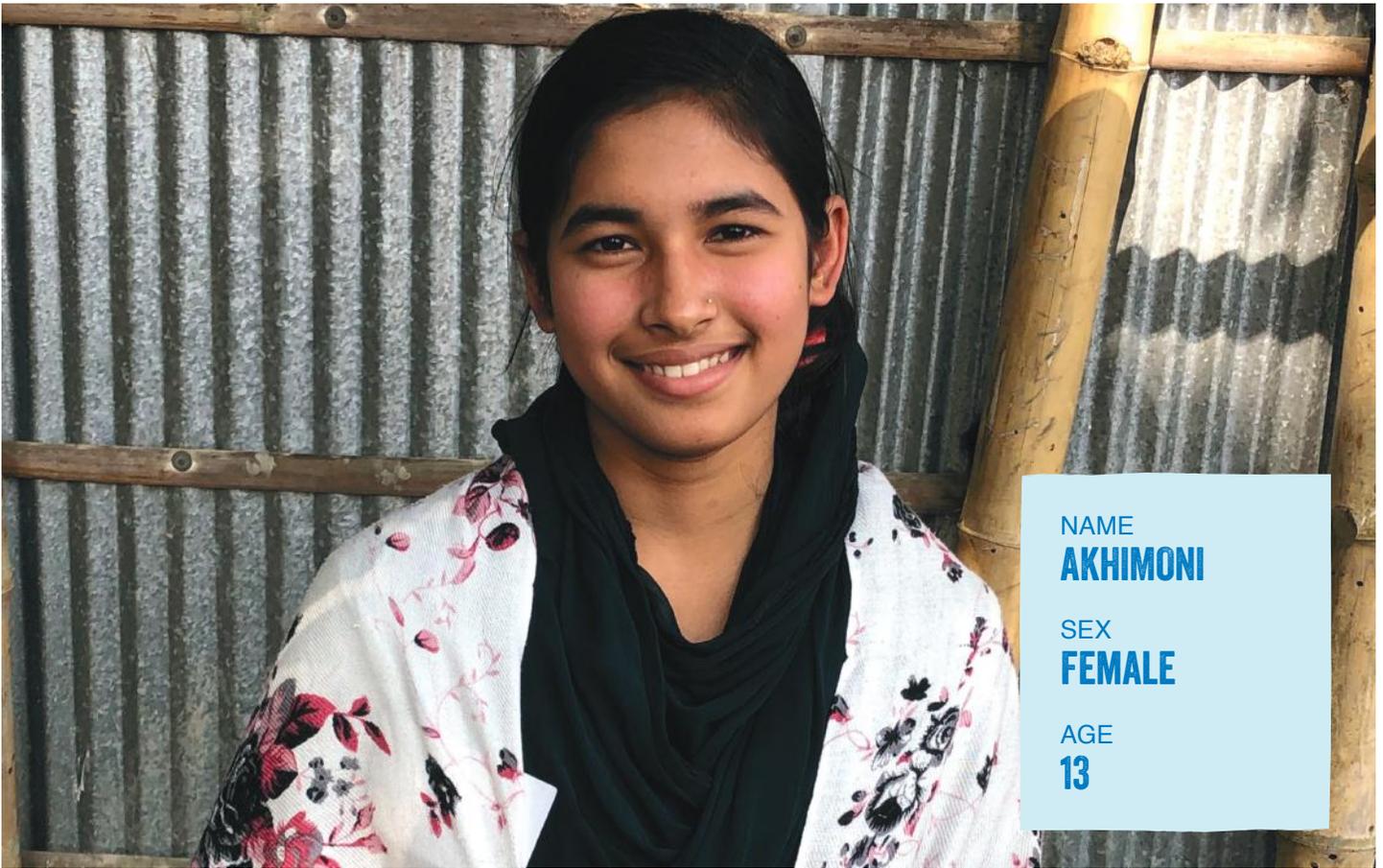
Adolescent girls and boys are happy about the changes and appreciate their fathers' sharing what they've learned in the Father's Club training sessions. They are noticing more discussion and happiness between their parents and are happy to have a better relationship with their fathers now. The stories on the following pages highlight the impact of the Father's Club training of men on individual mothers, fathers and adolescent girls and adolescent boys in the SHOW project countries.

## CASE STUDIES



Madhobi Rani Rai is a 29-year-old woman from Nilphamari District, Bangladesh, and is a teacher at an evening school for adults. She experienced challenges becoming a teacher, mainly because her husband did not want her to work. The strict patriarchal hierarchy in the household, whereby the husband is the ultimate decision maker means that women and girls' social status is strongly linked to gender norms of a woman being married, a housewife and a mother, and they are often socialized to submit to the authority of their fathers and then their husbands. Therefore, when Madhobi first began teaching, her husband restricted her from leaving the home, doing her job and talking with other men in the community, *“When I wanted to join the job, my husband said ‘no’ directly. I had to convince him with the help of other family members. I used to cry while leaving the home after our fight.”*

Madhobi learned about the Fathers Club sessions in her community and asked her husband to join sessions and learn from other members in the community. Since he has been actively participating, Madhobi is seeing positive changes to his behaviour and their relationship. Within her community, there is a very rigid division of labour along gendered lines, and norms around masculinity which stigmatize men who help with housework. However, as Madhobi's husband engages more with the Fathers Club sessions and other men in the community, his behaviour and support in the household is changing. They are now sharing the responsibility of household chores and taking care of one another, *“Now he helps me with household works so I can go to school earlier. Also, he takes care of me and asks me if I have eaten or not.”* Madhobi and her husband have learned to work very well together at home and since they are trained teachers, they teach together in evening school.



NAME  
**AKHIMONI**

SEX  
**FEMALE**

AGE  
**13**

Akhimoni is a 13-year-old girl who lives in Nilphamari district in Bangladesh. Akhimoni always wished her father would take her to school and spend more time with her. She began to think only children of rich fathers received love, attention and care from their fathers, *“I used to be very sad when I saw my friends’ fathers accompanying them to school.”*

When Akhimoni was 12-years-old, her father began to arrange a marriage for her as he believed that to be best thing for his daughter. In Bangladesh, 59% of girls are married before their 18th birthday<sup>3</sup>. Although the legal age of marriage is eighteen (18), many marriages occur much earlier; sometimes birth dates and birth records are even falsified to help facilitate the marriage of an underage girl or boy. The father, grandfather and uncles often control the process, which is also a financial transaction because of the tradition of dowry. Most parents will prefer early marriage for their daughters if they get a reasonable proposal, without considering the negative consequences and risks for their daughters.

Around the same time, Akhimoni’s father began to participate in Fathers Club sessions within his community. Within these sessions, he was given the opportunity to learn more about gender equality, girls’ rights and the importance of positive male engagement within the family and community. Specifically, he took part in a session that discussed domestic violence, and its high prevalence within child marriages. Through his participation in the sessions, he realized his daughter was too young to marry and he called off the wedding, breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence and inequality. He now spends more time with Akhimoni, which has helped strengthen their relationship, *“I feel so happy when my father and I go to school together.”*

Due to religious and cultural norms, women’s mobility and public roles are restricted. This is even more true for adolescent girls. Often, young unmarried girls are not allowed to talk in the community, and their movement is restricted to within the home. Therefore, when Akhimoni shared her interest in football with her father, there was hesitation at first because her father used to think football was only a game for boys, and girls should not be allowed to play sports. However, through his growing relationship with his daughter, Akhimoni’s father now understands both boys and girls should be treated equally. He encourages her to play and practice football with other girls in the village. Akhimoni feels empowered to break barriers within her community and aspires to become the first woman police officer in her community.



Shafa'atu is a 25-year-old woman from the district Kalmalo in Sokoto, Nigeria. Shafa'atu is a mother of three children and lives with her second husband's family. She ended her first marriage due to abusive treatment while in labour with her first child: *"after that experience, when it was forty days after I delivered, I ended the marriage because I couldn't continue a marriage like that."* Shafa'atu married for a second time and found she also faced problems with her husband when it came to receiving quality healthcare during her pregnancy. One day, after being encouraged by a local religious leader, Shafa'atu and her husband joined a community meeting, as part of the Fathers Club program, where different couples shared their relationship experiences related to their healthcare, childcare, housework and what it means to be a parent and a partner. Both Shafa'atu and her husband shared their experiences *"I narrated all the problems I faced at home. How he doesn't take care of me when I am sick, how I suffer during pregnancy, how he doesn't assist me with house chores, and we were all enlightened. That very day, he took me straight to the hospital from the meeting."*

The discussions at this community meeting has resulted in significant behaviour changes at the household level, *"Before women and children were not cared for. A man can wake up in the morning and not care about his children whether they woke up or not, if the child went to school or not, he was not concerned. Once he has dropped money for food in the morning whether it is enough or not, he doesn't care he just goes out. But now when he wakes up, he asks the children why they haven't gotten ready for school."* Not only is Shafa'atu's husband contributing more to their housework, lessening her burden, but she feels empowered to receive an education and involve herself in activities outside of the home: *"Even we mothers now, before who are we to go to school? We were just sitting at home as married women, we only sit at home and eat. But now he assists with house chores morning and evening. In the afternoons we read together."* In addition to these changes, Shafa'atu notes that she would like women to become more economically empowered to assist with their family's finances.

3. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh/>



Theophilus is a 29-year-old father from Volta, Ghana. Theophilus has 3 children who are 1-, 6- and 11-years-old. He would spend his days working on the farm while his wife would take care of household chores such as sweeping, cooking, fetching water and bathing their children. As a father, he thought his only role was to pay for school fees, bring home food for the family, pay for clothing, and provide shelter. He did not make time to engage with his children or to support their education other than financially. Theophilus' mother actually raised him to help with housework and she told him that when he marries, he should help his wife with house work and child care. Theophilus grew up learning how to cook, sweep, and fetch water. However, the culture within his community doesn't allow a man to participate in such work and stigmatizes men who take on such chores, *"it's just that our culture doesn't allow that a man sweeps, cooks, etc."*

Theophilus joined the local Fathers Clubs meetings to engage with fellow community members, *"when I encountered the program, I think this is the idea my mother was instilling in me."* People within the community thought his wife had turned him because he began helping with more housework and spending time with his children, *"My wife is not from the village, people thought that this woman from the outside has turned me into something."* He decided to look past the stigma, and work on bringing awareness and understanding to more men in the community, *"those who criticize us, we visit, we talk to them and after some time they also change."*

This has brought about a positive shift within their family household. His relationship with his wife has grown into a healthy partnership where they support one another, *"she has been telling her friend she is happy she is married to me."* She has begun an economic venture selling meat pies and bringing income to the home. Theophilus and his wife now hope the children in their life will follow in their footsteps and learn from them, *"the other day my son told my wife he will defeat me this week, which means he will sweep more than me."*



NAME  
**PEACE**

SEX  
**FEMALE**

AGE  
**42**

Peace is a 42-year-old female from Akrobortornu Afadzato South, Ghana. Peace has four children aged 5, 17, 18 and 24-years-old. Peace and her husband didn't always see eye-to-eye. Her husband would often be out all day, spending his time in the town and not supporting her at home. Traditionally, in her community, the role of the father in childcare revolves around meeting needs such as school fees, providing school uniforms, and paying hospital bills when children are sick, while the mother would be responsible for household chores and going to the market to trade.

One day, their 5-year-old daughter learned of the Fathers Club sessions in her community and encouraged her father to attend meetings. She has really taken interest in both her father's sessions and her mother's support group sessions and tries to join as many as she can. Peace's daughters' interest holds both Peace and her husband accountable to one another, but also exposes Peace to positive relationship dynamics and skill building for her future, *"she will learn these good practices and when she grows up she will pass them on."*

With Peace's husband began engaging frequently in the Fathers Club sessions, he began to take on more household and childcare work, *"now he has learned to be at home and spend time with his family."* Both Peace and her husband make decisions together and discipline their children together. Their children are happy their father has changed because it has brought peace to the family, *"I hope that my husband will continue to learn more, and that peace will prevail in the household."*



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