

Reconstructing Fatherhood After International Migration: A Narrative Inquiry into Masculinity, Emotional Expression, Parenting Practices, and Transnational Family Obligations

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore how immigrant fathers residing in Canada reconstructed their understandings and practices of fatherhood after international migration, with particular attention to masculinity, emotional expression, parenting involvement, and transnational family obligations.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative narrative inquiry design was employed. Eighteen immigrant fathers residing in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants had migrated to Canada as adults, had lived in the country for at least two years, and had at least one child. Data were collected through demographic forms, in-depth semi-structured narrative interviews, field notes, and reflexive memos. Interviews lasted 70–110 minutes, were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and, where necessary, translated into English with attention to conceptual equivalence. Data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. Each interview was first examined as a complete narrative case, followed by coding of significant episodes, cross-case comparison, identification of turning points, and development of overarching themes and narrative trajectories.

Findings: The analysis generated five interconnected themes: disruption of provider-centered masculine identity, learning emotional presence and vulnerability, renegotiation of paternal authority and everyday caregiving, reconstruction of fatherhood through marital and institutional encounters, and management of divided responsibilities within transnational family life. Three narrative trajectories were identified: transformative relational reconstruction, negotiated hybrid reconstruction, and defensive provider-centered reassertion. Migration weakened the stability of fatherhood models based primarily on income, occupational status, and unquestioned authority, while encouraging many participants to redefine paternal competence through emotional availability, shared caregiving, dialogue, and relational repair. However, adaptation remained uneven and was constrained by employment insecurity, racialization, intergenerational conflict, and continuing obligations toward relatives abroad.

Conclusion: International migration did not produce a simple transition from traditional to Western fatherhood; rather, it generated an ongoing process of negotiation through which fathers attempted to reconcile provision with presence, authority with dialogue, cultural continuity with children's autonomy, and responsibilities in Canada with enduring transnational family commitments.

Keywords: *immigrant fathers; narrative inquiry; masculinity; emotional expression; parenting practices; transnational families; Canada*

1 Introduction

Fatherhood is not a fixed biological or social position but a historically situated, culturally mediated, and relational identity that is continually constructed through men's interactions with children, partners, extended families, institutions, and wider systems of gender and social inequality. Contemporary scholarship has increasingly moved beyond the narrow characterization of fathers as secondary caregivers or economic providers and has emphasized their distinctive contributions to children's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social development. Father involvement may include direct caregiving, emotional availability, protection, guidance, play, educational support, household participation, and responsibility for the conditions in which children grow (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Research on early childhood development similarly indicates that paternal participation must be interpreted contextually because the forms, expectations, and consequences of father involvement vary according to family structure, socioeconomic circumstances, cultural norms, and institutional opportunities (Hoogar, 2026). Studies conducted in different cultural settings have associated active father involvement with children's learning, social competence, emotional regulation, and general developmental well-being (Cai, 2023). The unique influence of fathers on socioemotional development further suggests that paternal relationships cannot simply be treated as interchangeable with maternal relationships, even though parenting responsibilities may increasingly be shared (Zhong, 2023). Fathers can also contribute to resilience by helping children regulate stress, establish secure interpersonal expectations, and adapt to adversity through repeated patterns of sensitive and dependable interaction (Feldman, 2023). These perspectives position fatherhood as a significant developmental and relational practice whose meaning extends beyond financial provision and whose transformation can affect the organization and well-being of the entire family.

Despite growing recognition of involved fatherhood, expectations surrounding men's parenting remain deeply influenced by gender ideologies. In many social contexts, the

normative father has historically been associated with authority, discipline, protection, economic provision, emotional control, and responsibility for the family's public standing. Cross-cultural scholarship demonstrates that paternal roles are neither universal nor reducible to a single Western developmental model; rather, fathers' responsibilities are shaped by local traditions, kinship systems, religious expectations, labor arrangements, and ideas about obedience, autonomy, and intergenerational duty (Novianti et al., 2023). Analyses of masculinity and fathering in Chinese societies, for example, caution against applying Western, educated, industrialized, wealthy, and democratic assumptions as universal measures of effective fatherhood (Li et al., 2021). Cultural representations also contribute to public understandings of what fathers should be, how they ought to express love, and whether authority, sacrifice, companionship, or emotional warmth is treated as the defining feature of paternal identity (Afifulloh, 2022). Media representations of modern fatherhood may promote more emotionally involved and domestically engaged masculine identities, yet they can also reproduce classed, racialized, and national ideals that are difficult for many men to attain (Løfaldli, 2022). Consequently, fathers may be evaluated simultaneously according to older provider-centered expectations and newer ideals of emotional presence, intensive parenting, and egalitarian domestic participation.

The relationship between masculinity and care is especially important for understanding these competing demands. Hegemonic constructions of masculinity commonly value independence, strength, self-control, occupational success, and distance from activities culturally coded as feminine. These expectations can limit men's willingness to disclose uncertainty, sadness, fear, dependency, or emotional need. However, the concept of caring masculinities offers an alternative framework through which caregiving, interdependence, nonviolence, emotional responsiveness, and relational responsibility can be understood not as signs of masculine failure but as legitimate forms of male identity (Nayak, 2023). Recent work on the geographies of care further shows that men's caring practices are shaped by spatial arrangements, labor markets,

household resources, migration, and the unequal distribution of opportunities to provide care (Nayak, 2025). Traditional masculinity ideology may influence how fathers respond to parenting stress, regulate anger, interpret authority, and tolerate emotional vulnerability, while psychological flexibility may support more adaptive and responsive parenting practices (Zarling et al., 2025). The reconstruction of fatherhood therefore requires more than the acquisition of new parenting skills; it may involve a deeper renegotiation of the meanings through which men recognize themselves as competent, respected, responsible, and emotionally connected fathers.

Emotional expression is central to this renegotiation. The transition to fatherhood can produce joy, pride, fear, uncertainty, responsibility, loneliness, and anxiety, although men may have limited opportunities to articulate these experiences. Qualitative research with first-time fathers suggests that infancy can be accompanied by intense and sometimes contradictory emotions as men attempt to support their partners, bond with their children, and adjust to changed expectations of identity and family life (Chatterjee et al., 2026). Fatherhood under conditions of medical uncertainty, including preterm birth, can intensify feelings of helplessness, exclusion, responsibility, and emotional strain while also prompting fathers to become more attentive and involved caregivers (Driant & Hamon, 2024). Earlier relational experiences may continue to shape men's capacity to approach intimacy, caregiving, and vulnerability, as adverse childhood experiences and parental bonding histories can remain relevant to later paternal functioning and psychological well-being (Heshmati et al., 2024). Structured fatherhood interventions have consequently sought to strengthen parenting knowledge, emotional engagement, communication, and responsible involvement, reflecting recognition that paternal practices can be supported and transformed rather than treated as predetermined by gender or culture (Daniels, 2023). Emotional availability is therefore both a personal capacity and a socially organized practice that depends on whether men are permitted, encouraged, and materially able to participate in relational family life.

International migration makes these negotiations especially complex because it relocates fatherhood across different cultural, economic, legal, and institutional environments. Migration can unsettle familiar definitions of masculinity and parenting by changing men's occupational status, household authority, access to extended kin, linguistic competence, social networks, and relationships

with state institutions. Parenting adaptation among immigrants in Western societies often involves selective retention, revision, and rejection of practices associated with the country of origin while responding to the expectations of schools, child welfare systems, healthcare providers, and children socialized in the receiving society (Lee, 2026). Migrant parents rarely abandon one cultural model and adopt another in a linear manner. Instead, they negotiate hybrid practices shaped by intergenerational conflict, perceived cultural loss, children's autonomy, and the need to maintain family cohesion. Language maintenance can become emotionally charged because parents may interpret a heritage language as a means of preserving intimacy, identity, and connection with relatives, while children may experience its maintenance differently depending on family composition and social context (Rokita-Jaskow & Panek, 2025). Migration may also alter marital relationships by requiring couples to renegotiate domestic labor, economic contribution, communication, and cultural belonging within everyday transnational life (Raja & Yang, 2025). These changes can create opportunities for more egalitarian and emotionally engaged fatherhood, but they can also generate insecurity when men perceive a decline in authority or an inability to meet provider expectations.

Employment is one of the most consequential mechanisms through which migration reshapes paternal identity. Migrant fathers may encounter nonrecognition of qualifications, precarious employment, lower occupational status, racialized labor-market barriers, and the need to work long or irregular hours. Such experiences affect not only household income but also men's sense of dignity, competence, and legitimacy as fathers. Evidence concerning paternal unemployment indicates that job loss and economic insecurity can influence couple relationships, parental well-being, emotional climate, and interactions with children (Sümer et al., 2026). When economic provision has been central to masculine self-definition, unemployment or occupational downward mobility may be interpreted as a failure of fatherhood rather than solely as a structural labor-market problem. Fathers may respond by intensifying paid work, withdrawing emotionally, or attempting to reassert authority within the household. At the same time, reduced or changed employment may increase their involvement in childcare and domestic work, creating conditions for new relational practices. Fathers whose occupations require prolonged physical absence experience a similar tension between material provision and emotional presence. Research with offshore workers illustrates how

employment-based separation can complicate intimacy, participation in everyday parenting, and the continuity of relationships with children (Lesch, 2022). Migration thus produces a recurring paradox: the labor undertaken to secure children's futures may simultaneously reduce fathers' availability to participate in their daily lives.

The spatial separation of family members creates an additional form of fatherhood that cannot be understood solely through co-resident parenting models. Transnational fatherhood involves maintaining parental relationships and obligations across national borders through remittances, communication technologies, visits, decision-making, sponsorship, and the coordination of care. A practice-based approach emphasizes that transnational families are actively produced through repeated activities rather than merely defined by geographical separation (Szyszka, 2020). Fathers may perform care by sending money, monitoring children's education, offering advice, mediating conflicts, and remaining emotionally available through telephone and video communication. Research on separated immigrant families demonstrates that transnational fathering can involve flexible and creative efforts to sustain presence despite legal and geographical barriers (Roy & Yumiseva, 2021). Nevertheless, children may experience paternal migration in ways that differ from fathers' understandings of sacrifice and responsibility. Studies of father-child separation have shown that children's narratives can include longing, disappointment, idealization, emotional distance, and ambivalence toward the material benefits associated with migration (Verdezoto & Llanes, 2020). Adolescents' representations of close relationships may also be shaped by prolonged parental absence, caregiving substitutions, and uncertainty regarding family reunification (Jerves et al., 2020). Research on parental migration and children's life satisfaction further indicates that material support cannot automatically replace emotional support and that the effects of separation may vary according to the gender of both parent and child (Shu, 2020). These findings challenge the assumption that a father's successful provision necessarily produces a secure or satisfying father-child relationship.

Border regimes and migration law further structure the conditions under which fathers can care. The recognition of family relationships by states determines who may reunify, sponsor relatives, access legal status, and be acknowledged as a legitimate family member. Migration systems often privilege formally recognized marital and biological relationships, potentially excluding de facto, nonstandard, or socially constituted families from legal protection (Bonjour

& Diepenmaat, 2023). Research on transnational family formation illustrates that intimate and parental relationships are embedded in state regulation, documentation, mobility restrictions, and unequal access to citizenship (Haugen, 2022). Border regimes can separate fathers from children for prolonged periods and transform care into an activity conducted through anticipation, paperwork, financial transfers, and uncertain plans for reunion. Accounts of transnational fatherhood in Central Mexico demonstrate that separation is not simply an individual family choice but is produced by political and legal systems that regulate movement and constrain men's ability to remain physically present (Lee & Macías-Ayala, 2024). Parents who migrate without their children experience gendered and psychosocial reconfigurations of parenting, including guilt, disrupted authority, altered attachment, and dependence on substitute caregivers (Larrinaga-Bidegain et al., 2024). Accordingly, transnational fatherhood must be interpreted as an intersection between intimate family practices and institutional structures rather than as an arrangement created solely through private decisions.

Migration may also broaden fatherhood beyond the direct relationship between fathers and children by embedding men in complex networks of filial and extended-family obligation. Many migrant fathers simultaneously occupy the roles of parent, spouse, son, brother, sponsor, remittance sender, and distant caregiver. Transnational family reconfiguration may redistribute authority, dependence, caregiving, and financial responsibility among household members in both sending and receiving countries (Jaji, 2022). Expectations of filial piety can remain powerful after migration, although their meaning may be renegotiated when adult children are geographically distant or exposed to different ideals of independence and intergenerational responsibility (Han, 2022). Fathers may therefore direct resources toward ageing parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and other relatives while attempting to meet the costs of raising children in Canada. These obligations can preserve moral identity and family belonging, but they may also create conflict when spouses or children perceive transnational support as a reduction of resources available to the immediate household. The emotional labor of transnational fatherhood includes not only communicating with children but also managing worry, guilt, family crises, competing expectations, and the inability to offer physical care. Research among Pakistani migrant fathers has demonstrated how distance and duty become intertwined as men attempt to maintain emotional and material

responsibility across borders (Haider, 2025). Such emotional labor may remain socially invisible because it is frequently expressed through action, financial sacrifice, and problem-solving rather than explicit accounts of vulnerability.

Mobility also changes the temporal and relational organization of parenting. A transnational relational perspective emphasizes that fatherhood is constructed through connections among places, family members, life stages, and migration trajectories rather than within a single national setting (Lan, 2022). Some families move repeatedly, reunify after separation, or return to a previous country in search of education, safety, social status, cultural familiarity, or a preferred lifestyle. Research on reverse family migration shows that parental decisions may be shaped by aspirations for children as well as dissatisfaction with the social and educational environment of settlement (Ngan & Kit Wa Anita 陳潔華, 2023). Such mobility complicates assumptions that migration proceeds permanently from one country of origin to one country of destination. It may also require fathers to repeatedly reconstruct their authority, involvement, and relationships as children adapt differently to changing environments. The literature on parenting and migration has often concentrated on what is perceived as “troubling,” including separation, deficient care, intergenerational conflict, and children’s vulnerability (Juozeliūnienė et al., 2020). Although these concerns are important, a problem-centered focus can obscure migrant fathers’ agency, creativity, reflection, and efforts to develop forms of care that respond to multiple cultural and material realities.

The existing literature therefore provides substantial knowledge concerning father involvement, masculinity, emotional development, parenting across cultures, transnational separation, migration law, and extended-family obligation. However, these domains are frequently examined separately. Studies of father involvement often focus on developmental outcomes without tracing how men narratively reinterpret their identities after migration, whereas research on transnational families may emphasize geographical separation without examining the transformation of masculinity and everyday co-resident parenting. Similarly, scholarship on immigrant parenting often addresses adaptation at the family level but gives limited attention to fathers’ internal negotiations concerning emotional expression, occupational status, authority, and filial duty. Narrative inquiry is particularly appropriate for addressing this gap because it treats identity as temporally organized and constructed through stories linking past

experience, present circumstances, and anticipated futures. Fathers’ narratives can reveal how inherited models of masculinity are remembered, defended, criticized, or revised; how critical events become turning points; and how men explain contradictions between provision and presence, authority and dialogue, cultural continuity and children’s autonomy, or commitment to the Canadian household and responsibility toward relatives abroad. Examining these stories in the Canadian context is especially valuable because Canada’s multicultural population, diverse migration pathways, labor-market inequalities, and family reunification structures create varied conditions for the practice of immigrant fatherhood. The aim of this study was to explore how immigrant fathers residing in Canada narratively reconstructed masculinity, emotional expression, parenting practices, and transnational family obligations after international migration.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore how immigrant fathers reconstructed their understandings and practices of fatherhood following international migration to Canada. Narrative inquiry was selected because migration and fatherhood are temporally organized experiences through which individuals interpret changes in identity, family relationships, cultural expectations, and personal responsibilities. Rather than treating fatherhood as a fixed social role, the study approached it as an evolving identity constructed through personal stories, critical life events, family interactions, and encounters with different cultural models of masculinity and parenting. The narrative approach made it possible to examine how participants connected their premigration experiences with their current lives in Canada, how they interpreted changes in their emotional and parental roles, and how they negotiated obligations extending across national borders. Particular attention was given to the ways participants described continuity, disruption, conflict, and transformation in relation to masculinity, emotional expression, caregiving, authority, economic provision, and transnational family commitments.

The participants were 18 immigrant fathers residing in Canada. They were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling from immigrant community organizations, cultural associations, settlement agencies, parenting networks, social media groups, and personal

referrals. Purposive sampling was used to identify fathers who had direct experience of reconstructing their parental roles after migration and who could provide detailed accounts of changes in family life, masculine identity, and parenting practices. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed by inviting eligible participants to share information about the study with other immigrant fathers in their social or community networks. Recruitment continued until the narratives provided sufficient depth and diversity to address the research objectives and no substantially new narrative patterns emerged from the later interviews.

To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to identify as fathers, be at least 25 years of age, have been born outside Canada, have migrated to Canada as adults, have resided in Canada for at least two years, and have at least one child. Participants were also required to have maintained meaningful family relationships or responsibilities across national borders, including emotional, financial, caregiving, or decision-making obligations toward relatives living outside Canada. Fathers were eligible whether their children were born before or after migration and whether all or some of their children currently lived with them in Canada. Fathers who had migrated during early childhood or who did not have sufficient experience of parenting before or after migration were excluded because the study required participants to reflect on perceived changes across premigration and postmigration contexts.

The participants ranged in age from 30 to 54 years and had lived in Canada for between 3 and 17 years. They resided in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec and represented diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, socioeconomic, and migration backgrounds. Their countries of origin included Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, India, Pakistan, China, Nigeria, the Philippines, Colombia, and Ukraine. The sample included fathers who had entered Canada through skilled migration programs, family reunification, international study followed by permanent residency, and refugee or humanitarian pathways. Participants had between one and four children, whose ages ranged from early childhood to young adulthood. Most participants lived with their spouses and children in Canada, while several had children, parents, siblings, or other close relatives living in their countries of origin or in third countries. This diversity supported an examination of both common and context-specific processes through which fatherhood was reconstructed after migration.

2.2 Measures

Data were collected through a brief demographic information form, in-depth semi-structured narrative interviews, researcher field notes, and reflexive memos. The demographic form was completed before the interview and gathered contextual information concerning participants' age, country of origin, immigration pathway, length of residence in Canada, province of residence, marital status, educational level, employment status, number and ages of children, living arrangements, and the location of significant family members. These data were used to contextualize each participant's narrative rather than to categorize or statistically compare participants. Information about migration history and family composition was especially important for understanding how changes in employment, legal status, housing, language proficiency, family reunification, and geographical separation shaped participants' experiences of fatherhood.

The primary data collection tool was an in-depth semi-structured narrative interview guide developed in accordance with the objectives of the study and the principles of narrative inquiry. The guide was designed to encourage participants to construct detailed stories rather than provide brief responses to predetermined questions. Interviews began with a broad invitation asking participants to describe their journey of becoming and being a father before and after migration to Canada. Follow-up prompts explored significant experiences, turning points, challenges, contradictions, and perceived changes in fatherhood over time. The interviews addressed participants' understandings of a good father, memories of their own fathers, culturally inherited expectations of masculinity, the role of financial provision, changes in authority and decision-making, participation in childcare and domestic work, emotional communication with children, expressions of affection and vulnerability, marital negotiation, and relationships with schools, healthcare providers, and other Canadian institutions.

Additional prompts examined how participants managed obligations toward relatives living outside Canada. These questions focused on financial remittances, emotional support, caregiving from a distance, participation in family decisions, expectations from parents and extended relatives, visits to the country of origin, digital communication, and feelings of guilt, responsibility, loyalty, or divided belonging. Participants were encouraged to describe specific incidents illustrating how transnational obligations

influenced their relationships with spouses and children in Canada. They were also invited to discuss experiences of employment insecurity, downward occupational mobility, racialization, language barriers, social isolation, immigration status, and cultural difference when these experiences affected their sense of competence, authority, or identity as fathers. Throughout the interviews, the researcher used open-ended prompts such as asking what happened next, how the participant understood a particular event, how family members responded, and whether the participant's interpretation had changed over time.

Each participant completed one individual interview lasting between 70 and 110 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face in a private community or university setting or through a secure videoconferencing platform, depending on the participant's location and preference. Participants were offered the opportunity to be interviewed in English or in another language in which the trained interviewer was proficient. When interviews were conducted in a language other than English, they were transcribed in the original language and subsequently translated into English. Translation emphasized conceptual and narrative equivalence rather than literal word-for-word substitution. Culturally specific expressions related to fatherhood, masculinity, duty, respect, sacrifice, shame, affection, and family obligation were retained where necessary and accompanied by interpretive clarification.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts included pauses, emotional expressions, laughter, hesitation, and other features relevant to the interpretation of meaning. The researcher also prepared field notes immediately after each interview to document the interview context, key narrative moments, emotional shifts, nonverbal observations, emerging interpretations, and questions requiring further examination. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout data collection to examine how the researcher's own cultural assumptions, migration-related knowledge, gender expectations, and reactions to participants' stories could shape the interview process and subsequent analysis. Data collection and preliminary analysis occurred concurrently so that emerging narrative patterns could inform later interviews without restricting participants' accounts to previously identified categories.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, which combined attention to the content of participants' stories with an examination of how experiences were organized and interpreted across time. The analysis focused on the meanings participants attributed to migration-related changes in fatherhood rather than reducing their accounts to isolated statements detached from personal and cultural context. Each interview was initially treated as a complete narrative case. The researchers repeatedly read the transcript while listening to the audio recording to become familiar with the participant's language, emotional emphasis, chronology, and central concerns. A narrative profile was then prepared for each participant, summarizing his premigration model of fatherhood, migration trajectory, family circumstances, major turning points, present parenting practices, emotional relationships, masculine self-understanding, and transnational obligations.

During the next stage, the transcripts were divided into narrative episodes representing meaningful events or periods, such as childhood experiences with the participant's own father, the transition to fatherhood, the decision to migrate, early settlement difficulties, employment changes, family reunification, conflict over parenting roles, increased participation in caregiving, emotional conversations with children, and negotiations concerning financial support for relatives abroad. Initial codes were assigned to passages that captured actions, meanings, emotions, dilemmas, and identity claims. Examples included providing as proof of fatherhood, loss of occupational status, weakened paternal authority, learning emotional language, fear of appearing vulnerable, becoming more involved in daily care, negotiating discipline across cultures, pressure to send remittances, guilt toward ageing parents, tension between nuclear and extended family needs, and redefining sacrifice.

The initial codes were compared within and across participants to identify recurring narrative patterns and significant differences. Related codes were organized into broader interpretive categories concerning masculine identity, emotional expression, parenting practices, marital negotiation, cultural adaptation, institutional encounters, and transnational responsibility. The analysis examined not only what participants reported but also how they positioned themselves in relation to competing cultural expectations. Particular attention was paid to narrative contrasts such as the provider and caregiver, authority and companionship, emotional restraint and emotional availability, individual

autonomy and extended-family duty, cultural continuity and adaptation, and personal choice and structural constraint. Contradictory accounts and negative cases were retained because they revealed that migration did not produce a uniform transformation in fatherhood. Some participants described migration as enabling more emotionally engaged and egalitarian parenting, whereas others experienced diminished status, intensified provider pressure, or uncertainty regarding their paternal role.

Temporal analysis was used to examine how participants linked past, present, and anticipated future identities. The researchers identified turning points that altered participants' understandings of fatherhood, including unemployment, the birth of a child in Canada, family separation, conflict with adolescents, encounters with Canadian schools, marital disagreement, discrimination, illness of a parent abroad, or an inability to fulfil financial obligations. Narrative sequences were examined to determine how participants explained change, attributed responsibility, justified decisions, and evaluated their own development as fathers. The analysis also considered the cultural narratives participants drew upon when describing masculinity, duty, love, respect, success, and sacrifice. These personal stories were interpreted within the broader social conditions of immigration, labour-market participation, racialization, settlement policy, gender norms, and transnational family life.

The final themes were developed through an iterative process of coding, comparison, memo writing, narrative mapping, and discussion among the researchers. Themes were required to be conceptually coherent, grounded in multiple participants' accounts, and capable of representing both shared patterns and variations across cases. The researchers repeatedly returned to complete transcripts to ensure that thematic interpretations remained consistent with the overall structure and meaning of each participant's story. Analytic decisions were documented in an audit trail containing coding records, theme-development notes, narrative summaries, reflexive memos, and revisions to the thematic framework.

Several strategies were used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Participants were offered an opportunity to review a summary of their interview and clarify or expand important aspects of their accounts. Peer debriefing was conducted among members of the research team to examine alternative interpretations and challenge assumptions. Differences in coding or thematic interpretation were resolved through discussion and re-

examination of the original narratives. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to acknowledge the influence of the researchers' positions and expectations. Thick description was used to preserve the social, cultural, and biographical contexts of participants' experiences, while purposive recruitment of fathers from diverse migration backgrounds enhanced the range of perspectives represented. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of recruitment, interviewing, transcription, coding, and theme development, and confirmability was strengthened by linking all interpretive conclusions directly to participants' narratives.

3 Findings and Results

Eighteen immigrant fathers residing in Canada participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 54 years, with a mean age of 41.72 years and a standard deviation of 6.48 years. Their length of residence in Canada ranged from 3 to 17 years, with an average residence duration of 8.61 years. Eight participants lived in Ontario, four lived in British Columbia, four lived in Alberta, and two lived in Quebec. The participants had migrated from 10 countries: Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, India, Pakistan, China, Nigeria, the Philippines, Colombia, and Ukraine. Three participants were originally from Iran; two participants each were from Afghanistan, Syria, India, Pakistan, China, and Nigeria; and one participant each was from the Philippines, Colombia, and Ukraine. This geographical and cultural diversity enabled the study to examine fatherhood reconstruction across different family traditions, migration trajectories, social expectations, and cultural models of masculinity.

Seven participants had entered Canada through skilled-worker or economic immigration programs, four had migrated through refugee or humanitarian pathways, four had arrived through family reunification, and three had initially entered Canada as international students before obtaining permanent residency. Fourteen participants were married and living with their spouses, two were remarried, one was separated, and one was divorced. Sixteen participants lived with at least one of their children in Canada. Two participants had one or more children residing outside Canada because of delayed family reunification, custody arrangements, or educational circumstances. Four participants had one child, eight had two children, four had three children, and two had four children. Collectively, the participants were fathers to 40 children whose ages ranged

from 2 to 25 years. Nine participants had become fathers before migrating to Canada, five had children both before and after migration, and four had become fathers after settling in Canada. These different timings of migration and entry into fatherhood influenced the extent to which participants could directly compare parenting expectations and practices across national and cultural settings.

Educationally, three participants had completed secondary education, four held college or technical diplomas, six held bachelor's degrees, and five held graduate degrees. At the time of the interviews, 12 participants were employed full-time, three were self-employed, two worked part-time, and one was unemployed. Despite relatively high educational attainment, nine participants reported that their first employment in Canada was below the occupational or professional level they had achieved before migration. Five had subsequently returned to occupations broadly consistent with their qualifications, whereas four continued to experience occupational downward mobility. Participants' financial circumstances ranged from relative economic security to persistent pressure associated with housing costs, childcare expenses, unstable employment, remittances, immigration sponsorship, and support for relatives living

abroad. Seventeen participants maintained regular digital communication with family members outside Canada, 15 sent financial assistance or remittances, and 11 were involved in coordinating care for parents or other relatives in their countries of origin. These demographic and migration-related circumstances provided the context within which the participants narrated changes in masculine identity, emotional expression, parenting involvement, paternal authority, and transnational responsibility.

Analysis of the participants' narratives generated five interconnected themes: disruption of the provider-centered masculine identity, learning emotional presence and vulnerability, renegotiation of paternal authority and everyday caregiving, reconstructing fatherhood through marital and institutional encounters, and managing divided responsibilities within transnational family life. These themes were not independent stages of a uniform process. Instead, they represented overlapping dimensions through which fathers interpreted the continuities, disruptions, and contradictions that followed migration. Table 1 presents the overarching themes, constituent subthemes, central narrative meanings, and number of participants whose narratives contained clear evidence of each theme.

Table 1

Overarching Themes and Subthemes in the Reconstruction of Fatherhood After Migration

Overarching theme	Subthemes	Central narrative meaning	Participants, n
Disruption of the provider-centered masculine identity	Occupational downward mobility; financial provision as paternal legitimacy; loss and reconstruction of masculine status	Migration weakened the participants' ability to define successful fatherhood primarily through income, occupational status, authority, and material provision, requiring them to reconsider the foundations of paternal worth	16
Learning emotional presence and vulnerability	Inherited emotional restraint; development of emotional language; affection, listening, and psychological availability	Fathers increasingly understood emotional accessibility as a central parenting responsibility, although expressions of vulnerability remained constrained by internalized masculine expectations	15
Renegotiation of paternal authority and everyday caregiving	Movement from command to explanation; participation in routine childcare; negotiation of discipline and children's autonomy	Fatherhood shifted from a predominantly hierarchical and supervisory position toward greater daily involvement, dialogue, negotiation, and relational authority	17
Reconstructing fatherhood through marital and institutional encounters	Renegotiation of gender roles; encounters with schools and services; racism, language, and social marginalization	Participants reconstructed parenting through interactions with spouses, children, schools, healthcare systems, settlement institutions, and the broader social environment of Canada	14
Managing divided responsibilities within transnational family life	Remittances and material support; remote caregiving and digital intimacy; guilt, loyalty, and boundary-setting	Fathers experienced parenthood as embedded in obligations extending beyond the household in Canada, producing tensions between nuclear-family needs and responsibilities toward relatives abroad	18

Table 1 demonstrates that the reconstruction of fatherhood was shaped by both changes within the household and broader transformations in the participants' social and economic positions. The disruption of the provider-centered masculine identity appeared in the

narratives of 16 fathers and frequently served as the initial crisis through which participants began to question previously taken-for-granted understandings of masculinity and paternal competence. Before migration, many participants had associated a respectable father with

economic independence, occupational standing, decisiveness, discipline, and the capacity to protect family members from material insecurity. Migration disrupted this framework when qualifications were not recognized, previous professional identities became less relevant, employment was unstable, or earnings were insufficient relative to the cost of living in Canada. Participants who had formerly occupied professional or managerial positions described their early employment in transportation, retail, manual labour, food services, security, or other jobs as more than an occupational change. It represented a loss of social status and a perceived weakening of paternal legitimacy. Several fathers initially responded by working extended hours, taking multiple jobs, or concealing financial anxiety from their families. However, these strategies often reduced the time and psychological energy available for parenting, producing a contradiction between providing for children and being relationally present with them. Over time, many participants reconstructed provision as a broader responsibility that included emotional security, practical caregiving, guidance, predictability, and participation in family life. Nevertheless, the provider ideal did not disappear. It continued to influence fathers' self-evaluations, particularly when they were unable to purchase housing, fund children's activities, sponsor relatives, or provide assistance to parents abroad. Learning emotional presence and vulnerability was reported by 15 participants and represented one of the most significant changes in the meaning of fatherhood. Many fathers recalled growing up in families in which paternal love was communicated indirectly through sacrifice, work, protection, advice, or discipline rather than through verbal affection, physical warmth, apology, or discussion of fear and sadness. After migration, participants encountered parenting expectations that emphasized children's emotional development, open communication, active listening, and recognition of children's perspectives. Their children, especially those attending Canadian schools, also expected explanations, emotional responsiveness, and greater freedom to express disagreement. Participants therefore described learning to name emotions, ask children about their experiences, listen without immediately correcting them, express affection verbally, and acknowledge personal mistakes. These changes were often gradual and uncomfortable. Some fathers feared that excessive emotional openness would weaken authority, encourage disrespect, or expose them as uncertain. Others distinguished between vulnerability that strengthened relationships and vulnerability that they

believed might burden children. The participants' narratives indicated that emotional reconstruction was not simply an adoption of Canadian parenting norms. It involved selective adaptation in which fathers attempted to preserve responsibility, respect, and moral guidance while rejecting emotional distance and fear-based authority. The third theme, renegotiation of paternal authority and everyday caregiving, appeared in 17 narratives. Migration altered household routines because many families lacked the extended kin networks, domestic assistance, and gendered support structures available in their countries of origin. Fathers became more involved in cooking, school transportation, medical appointments, bedtime routines, homework, recreational activities, and direct supervision of children. For some participants, practical involvement emerged from necessity because both parents were employed. For others, it reflected an intentional effort to become the type of father they believed their children needed. Participants increasingly described authority as something sustained through trust, consistency, explanation, and negotiated boundaries rather than through unquestioned obedience. Nevertheless, conflict remained around adolescent autonomy, dating, clothing, digital media, friendships, religious participation, academic expectations, and intergenerational respect. Fathers often felt positioned between the disciplinary practices they had inherited and the more individualistic expectations their children encountered in Canada. Reconstructing fatherhood through marital and institutional encounters was evident in 14 narratives. Participants' parenting roles were frequently renegotiated through conversations or conflicts with spouses regarding employment, domestic work, discipline, emotional labour, and decision-making. Some men initially interpreted requests for greater household participation as criticism of their ability to fulfil the provider role. Over time, however, several described shared parenting as a practical and relational partnership rather than a loss of masculine status. Encounters with schools, healthcare professionals, child-development services, and settlement agencies also reshaped paternal practices. Teachers' expectations concerning parental engagement, institutional emphasis on children's rights, and professional advice about communication and discipline sometimes challenged participants' assumptions about parental authority. At the same time, language barriers, racialization, unfamiliarity with institutional procedures, and experiences of being stereotyped as authoritarian, emotionally distant, or culturally deficient created defensiveness and alienation. Fathers therefore

reconstructed parenting not only through cultural adaptation but also through efforts to protect their dignity and maintain an intelligible parental identity in institutions where they did not always feel socially recognized. The final theme, managing divided responsibilities within transnational family life, appeared in all 18 narratives. Participants did not experience fatherhood as limited to relationships with children living in Canada. Their identities as sons, brothers, uncles, sponsors, providers, and family representatives remained active across national borders. Financial remittances, emotional support, coordination of medical care, involvement in family decisions, sponsorship applications, and crisis assistance frequently competed with the immediate needs of spouses and children in Canada. Participants described guilt when they could not meet relatives' expectations, resentment when requests seemed unlimited, and anxiety when family members abroad interpreted migration as evidence of financial success. In several narratives, children and spouses in Canada questioned why household resources were being directed

abroad, while relatives in the country of origin regarded continued assistance as a moral obligation. The reconstruction of fatherhood consequently involved redefining the boundaries of responsibility without abandoning relationships that participants regarded as central to loyalty, identity, and moral personhood.

Although the five themes were widely shared, participants differed in how they integrated migration-related changes into their paternal identities. Cross-case analysis identified three principal narrative trajectories: transformative relational reconstruction, negotiated hybrid reconstruction, and defensive provider-centered reassertion. These trajectories represented dominant patterns in the organization of participants' stories rather than permanent or mutually exclusive personality types. Fathers could display features of more than one trajectory in different areas of family life, but each participant's overall narrative was assigned to the trajectory that best represented his interpretation of change, continuity, conflict, and paternal legitimacy.

Table 2

Narrative Trajectories in the Reconstruction of Fatherhood

Narrative trajectory	Participants, n	Premigration orientation	Major turning points	Dominant reconstructed practices	Continuing tensions
Transformative relational reconstruction	7	Fatherhood primarily associated with provision, protection, discipline, and responsibility	Occupational disruption, increased caregiving, children's emotional needs, marital negotiation, and recognition of emotional distance	Emotional openness, shared caregiving, dialogical discipline, apology, active listening, and flexible gender roles	Fear of losing authority, guilt concerning previous emotional distance, and tension with extended-family expectations
Negotiated hybrid reconstruction	8	Commitment to hierarchical responsibility combined with varying levels of emotional and practical involvement	Children's adaptation to Canadian society, school encounters, intergenerational conflict, dual-earner family life, and transnational demands	Selective incorporation of emotional communication, negotiated autonomy, continued emphasis on respect, cultural continuity, and paternal guidance	Uncertainty about which cultural practices to preserve, inconsistent boundaries, and conflict over adolescent independence
Defensive provider-centered reassertion	3	Strong identification of masculinity and fatherhood with income, authority, sacrifice, and obedience	Employment insecurity, perceived loss of status, marital conflict, children's resistance, and experiences of social marginalization	Intensified work commitment, control of major decisions, strict discipline, limited disclosure of vulnerability, and emphasis on material sacrifice	Emotional disconnection, conflict with spouse or children, exhaustion, perceived disrespect, and difficulty adapting to changing family roles

As shown in Table 2, seven participants followed a trajectory of transformative relational reconstruction. Their narratives contained explicit recognition that migration had exposed limitations in the fatherhood models they had inherited. These participants did not necessarily reject cultural traditions or the importance of financial responsibility; rather, they expanded their definitions of masculine and paternal competence. Occupational

disruption, periods of unemployment, increased participation in childcare, and emotionally difficult interactions with children often functioned as critical turning points. Some participants realized that working continuously to provide material security had reproduced the emotional absence they associated with their own fathers. Others changed after a child experienced anxiety, social isolation, bullying, academic pressure, or difficulty adapting to

migration. These fathers increasingly defined strength as the ability to remain emotionally available, communicate calmly, accept criticism, share domestic work, and repair damaged relationships. Apologizing to a child, once interpreted as weakening paternal authority, was reframed as evidence of self-control and relational responsibility. Their stories frequently followed a movement from disruption and defensiveness toward reflection and intentional change. Nevertheless, transformation was incomplete. Participants continued to experience anxiety about whether relational parenting could coexist with authority, particularly when children challenged cultural, religious, or family expectations. Eight participants demonstrated negotiated hybrid reconstruction, the most common trajectory. These fathers selectively combined inherited parenting values with practices encountered in Canada. They retained strong commitments to respect for parents, educational achievement, family solidarity, moral supervision, and responsibility toward extended kin, while incorporating more discussion, affection, shared decision-making, and recognition of children's autonomy. Their narratives did not present migration as a simple transition from traditional to modern fatherhood. Instead, they described an ongoing process of evaluation in which parenting practices were accepted, modified, or rejected according to their perceived consequences. For example, participants might support children's freedom to choose extracurricular activities or academic pathways while maintaining stricter expectations regarding dating, substance use, religious practice, or obligations to family members. They often distinguished between freedom and lack of boundaries, and between respectful dialogue and a perceived loss of parental hierarchy. Hybrid reconstruction was therefore marked by continual negotiation rather than resolution. These fathers frequently adapted their behaviour according to the child's age, gender, personality, or degree of cultural identification. They also reported inconsistency when spouses adopted different positions regarding discipline or autonomy. The three participants classified within the defensive provider-centered reassertion trajectory experienced migration-related changes primarily as threats to masculine status and parental authority. Employment insecurity, occupational downgrading, dependence on a spouse's income, limited English or French proficiency, racialized treatment, and children's resistance to traditional expectations intensified

their attachment to provision, control, and obedience as markers of fatherhood. These participants emphasized the sacrifices they had made for migration and expected children to recognize such sacrifices through compliance, academic success, and family loyalty. Emotional restraint was defended as protection against burdening the family or appearing weak. Increased domestic participation was sometimes undertaken pragmatically but was not incorporated into a positive masculine identity. Consequently, these fathers were more likely to describe household changes as losses imposed by migration rather than opportunities for paternal development. Their narratives included greater conflict with spouses or adolescent children, feelings of disrespect, emotional withdrawal, and exhaustion from extended working hours. Importantly, defensive reassertion did not indicate an absence of affection or concern. These participants expressed deep commitment to their children, but their care was primarily communicated through labour, financial sacrifice, surveillance, advice, and attempts to control future risks. Across all three trajectories, the reconstruction of fatherhood was neither linear nor complete. Participants could demonstrate emotional openness in one relationship and rigidity in another, or adopt shared caregiving while retaining provider-centered standards for evaluating themselves. The trajectories therefore illustrated different ways in which fathers organized and justified change while attempting to preserve a coherent sense of masculinity, cultural identity, and parental responsibility.

Transnational obligations constituted a central dimension of every participant's narrative, although the type, intensity, and consequences of those obligations differed considerably. Participants remained involved in family relationships across borders through financial transfers, emotional communication, care coordination, participation in decisions, immigration sponsorship, and responses to illness or crisis. Table 3 summarizes the principal forms of transnational obligation, the number of participants reporting each form, its main effects on fatherhood and household relationships in Canada, and the strategies participants used to manage competing demands. Because participants generally carried more than one form of obligation, the frequencies shown in the table are overlapping and should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive categories.

Table 3*Forms, Consequences, and Management of Transnational Family Obligations*

Form of transnational obligation	Participants, n	Manifestation in participants' lives	Effects on fatherhood and family life in Canada	Common management strategies
Financial remittances and material support	15	Regular or emergency transfers for living costs, education, housing, debt, medication, or family ceremonies	Household budget pressure, additional employment, disagreement with spouse, reduced savings, and reinforcement of provider identity	Fixed remittance budgets, prioritization of emergencies, joint financial decisions, and limits on repeated requests
Emotional monitoring and digital availability	18	Frequent telephone calls, video communication, mediation of family conflicts, and emotional reassurance	Emotional fatigue, divided attention, interrupted family time, continued belonging, and preservation of intergenerational relationships	Scheduled communication, shared family calls, selective availability, and inclusion of children in transnational relationships
Coordination of care for ageing or ill relatives	11	Arranging medical care, sending medication, paying caregivers, communicating with healthcare providers, and coordinating siblings	Guilt, helplessness, anxiety, distraction from parenting, and conflict over the unequal distribution of care	Delegation among siblings, financial contribution in place of physical care, remote coordination, and periodic travel
Participation in family decisions abroad	12	Involvement in marriage, property, education, inheritance, caregiving, and conflict-resolution decisions	Maintenance of status in the extended family, pressure to remain authoritative, and competing expectations from relatives and the Canadian household	Consultation with spouse, reduction of involvement in minor decisions, and clarification of decision-making boundaries
Immigration sponsorship and reunification responsibilities	9	Sponsorship applications, legal and administrative support, accommodation planning, and financial guarantees	Long-term financial pressure, uncertainty, marital tension, hope for family reunification, and concerns about future caregiving	Staged sponsorship, financial planning, legal consultation, and explicit household agreements
Crisis-related support	14	Responses to illness, death, war, political instability, displacement, unemployment, or sudden financial emergencies	Acute stress, feelings of powerlessness, increased remittances, disrupted routines, and heightened protection of children in Canada	Emergency funds, community fundraising, shared responsibility with relatives, and temporary increases in communication
Cultural and intergenerational continuity	16	Teaching language, religion, family history, cultural practices, and obligations toward elders	Strengthened identity and belonging, intergenerational connection, conflict with children, and concern about cultural loss	Family storytelling, visits, digital contact with relatives, cultural activities, and flexible interpretation of traditions

Table 3 indicates that transnational responsibility was not an additional issue separate from fatherhood but a central context through which paternal and masculine identities were interpreted. Financial remittances were reported by 15 participants and were commonly understood as evidence of loyalty, gratitude, masculine responsibility, and continued membership in the extended family. Participants supported parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, former spouses, children living abroad, or relatives affected by unemployment, illness, political instability, or displacement. For some fathers, sending money reinforced a sense of competence that had been damaged by occupational downward mobility in Canada. Even when employment no longer provided the status previously associated with masculinity, the ability to support relatives abroad allowed participants to maintain an identity as dependable providers. At the same time, remittances created substantial household pressure. Participants described postponing savings, home ownership, vacations, children's activities, or personal needs to fulfil obligations abroad. Disagreements arose when spouses

believed that requests from relatives were excessive, unequally distributed among siblings, or based on unrealistic assumptions about financial life in Canada. Fathers sometimes concealed the full amount of assistance they provided, while others developed joint financial agreements with their spouses to prevent secrecy and resentment. Emotional monitoring and digital availability appeared in all 18 narratives. Smartphones and communication platforms enabled fathers to remain closely involved in family life across borders, but this accessibility also created an expectation of constant availability. Participants mediated disputes, received distressing news, advised younger relatives, reassured ageing parents, and participated in family events through video calls. Although these interactions maintained belonging, they also generated emotional fatigue and divided attention. Several fathers reported receiving urgent calls during work, meals, children's activities, or late at night because of time-zone differences. They could be physically present with their children in Canada while psychologically absorbed in a

crisis elsewhere. Some participants responded by scheduling calls, including their children in conversations with grandparents, or distinguishing between genuine emergencies and matters that could be handled by relatives living closer to the family member in need. Care coordination for ageing or ill relatives was described by 11 participants and represented one of the most emotionally difficult obligations. Fathers arranged medical appointments, paid for treatment, communicated with physicians, transferred funds, hired caregivers, or coordinated responsibilities among siblings. Their distress was intensified by physical distance and the inability to provide direct care. Participants frequently compared the support they offered their children in Canada with the care they could not personally provide to their own parents. This comparison produced guilt and a sense that migration had improved one generation's opportunities while weakening another generation's security. Periodic travel offered temporary relief but was limited by employment responsibilities, costs, immigration documentation, and the needs of children in Canada. Twelve participants remained involved in major decisions concerning property, inheritance, marriage, education, caregiving, and family disputes abroad. Such involvement preserved their status as responsible sons, brothers, or senior family members, but it could also reinforce expectations that they should finance decisions over which they had limited control. Some participants gradually withdrew from minor decisions, explaining that geographical distance reduced their knowledge of local circumstances. Others continued to exercise authority because relatives expected them to provide both financial resources and final approval. Immigration sponsorship and reunification responsibilities were reported by nine fathers. These responsibilities involved financial guarantees, accommodation planning, documentation, communication with legal professionals, and uncertainty about processing times. Sponsorship was generally narrated as a moral obligation and a means of repairing family separation, but it also raised concerns about housing, childcare, future eldercare, and the effect of newly arrived relatives on marital privacy. Crisis-related support appeared in 14 narratives and intensified during serious illness, bereavement, war, political instability, displacement, or sudden unemployment. During these periods, fathers described difficulty maintaining ordinary parenting routines because their attention was focused on relatives' safety. Some attempted to protect children from distressing information, whereas others used family crises to teach

empathy, gratitude, and responsibility. Cultural and intergenerational continuity was reported by 16 participants and connected transnational obligation directly to parenting. Fathers encouraged children to learn heritage languages, communicate with grandparents, understand migration histories, participate in cultural or religious practices, and recognize obligations toward relatives. However, children did not always interpret these responsibilities in the same manner. Some viewed regular contact and cultural learning positively, while others experienced them as imposed expectations unrelated to their daily lives in Canada. Fathers therefore had to decide whether cultural continuity would be maintained through authority, persuasion, modelling, or voluntary participation. Across the narratives, successful management of transnational obligations depended on the development of boundaries rather than the abandonment of extended-family responsibilities. Participants who openly discussed remittances with spouses, distributed caregiving among siblings, scheduled communication, and differentiated urgent needs from habitual demands described less conflict and greater coherence between their Canadian household responsibilities and transnational commitments. Those who interpreted every request as an absolute test of loyalty were more likely to experience exhaustion, secrecy, resentment, and reduced emotional availability to their children. The findings consequently showed that reconstructing fatherhood after migration required fathers to redefine not only how they cared for their children but also how they understood the limits of sacrifice, the hierarchy of family obligations, and the meaning of responsible masculinity across national borders.

Overall, the findings revealed that international migration destabilized established models of fatherhood while also creating conditions for their reconstruction. Participants' stories were characterized by simultaneous loss and expansion: loss of occupational status, familiar authority, extended-family support, and cultural certainty was accompanied by increased caregiving, emotional communication, marital negotiation, and reflection on inherited masculine norms. Fatherhood after migration was neither a complete continuation of premigration traditions nor a straightforward adoption of Canadian parenting practices. It was a negotiated and often contradictory process shaped by labour-market experiences, family relationships, children's adaptation, institutional encounters, racialization, cultural memory, and obligations extending beyond national borders. The participants' narratives ultimately demonstrated that paternal identity was reconstructed

through the effort to reconcile material provision with emotional presence, authority with dialogue, cultural continuity with children's autonomy, and commitment to the household in Canada with enduring responsibility toward family members elsewhere.

4 Discussion

The present study explored how immigrant fathers residing in Canada reconstructed fatherhood after international migration, with particular attention to masculinity, emotional expression, parenting practices, and transnational family obligations. The findings showed that fatherhood reconstruction was not a linear process of replacing the cultural norms of the country of origin with Canadian parenting values. Instead, participants selectively preserved, revised, and combined different models of fatherhood in response to migration-related changes in employment, family structure, institutional expectations, children's cultural adaptation, and continuing responsibilities toward relatives abroad. Five interconnected themes were identified: disruption of the provider-centered masculine identity, learning emotional presence and vulnerability, renegotiation of paternal authority and everyday caregiving, reconstructing fatherhood through marital and institutional encounters, and managing divided responsibilities within transnational family life. Three broader narrative trajectories also emerged: transformative relational reconstruction, negotiated hybrid reconstruction, and defensive provider-centered reassertion. Together, these findings indicate that immigrant fatherhood is best understood as a relational, culturally situated, and structurally constrained identity project through which men attempt to preserve paternal legitimacy while adapting to new economic, emotional, and interpersonal demands.

The disruption of provider-centered masculinity was one of the most prominent findings. Most participants had entered migration with an understanding of successful fatherhood strongly connected to stable employment, material provision, protection, occupational standing, and the capacity to make important family decisions. When migration resulted in unemployment, precarious work, nonrecognition of qualifications, or downward occupational mobility, the consequences extended beyond financial insecurity. Participants experienced these conditions as threats to masculine dignity and paternal competence. This finding is consistent with evidence showing that paternal unemployment can alter family dynamics, weaken

psychological well-being, intensify couple conflict, and negatively affect fathers' interactions with children (Sümer et al., 2026). For immigrant fathers, however, employment disruption may carry additional symbolic weight because migration is commonly justified as a sacrifice undertaken to secure a better future for the family. Failure to achieve expected economic mobility can therefore be interpreted as both occupational disappointment and moral failure. The participants' narratives also resembled the experiences of fathers whose employment requires prolonged absence, in that paid work could preserve the provider role while simultaneously reducing opportunities for emotional and practical involvement in children's lives (Lesch, 2022). Fathers who responded to financial insecurity by working longer hours often found themselves caught between two competing standards: the expectation to provide sufficient material resources and the newer expectation to remain psychologically and physically present.

At the same time, many participants broadened their definitions of provision by incorporating emotional stability, guidance, caregiving, reliability, and participation in daily family life. This reconstruction supports contemporary perspectives that understand father involvement as multidimensional rather than limited to financial contribution (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Fathers' involvement in children's daily routines, education, emotional regulation, and social development has been associated with positive developmental outcomes across different cultural settings (Cai, 2023). The participants' accounts similarly suggested that paternal value could be restored when men recognized that children evaluated them not only according to what they earned but also according to whether they listened, participated, and remained available during difficult experiences. This interpretation is compatible with research emphasizing fathers' distinctive contributions to children's socioemotional development (Zhong, 2023) and resilience (Feldman, 2023). The findings therefore do not indicate that material provision became unimportant after migration. Rather, provision was gradually redefined as one component of a wider relational responsibility. For many participants, this expanded model allowed fatherhood to remain meaningful even when migration weakened the occupational status through which paternal identity had previously been validated.

The emergence of emotional presence and vulnerability as central features of reconstructed fatherhood represented another major finding. Many participants had grown up in families in which paternal affection was expressed indirectly

through work, sacrifice, protection, advice, or discipline. Verbal affection, emotional disclosure, apology, and explicit discussion of fear or sadness were less familiar. Following migration, fathers encountered children and institutions that placed greater emphasis on emotional communication, active listening, and psychological availability. Participants consequently described learning to identify emotions, ask children about their experiences, acknowledge mistakes, and express affection more openly. These accounts correspond with research showing that fathers experience complex emotional transitions but may lack culturally acceptable opportunities to articulate uncertainty and vulnerability (Chatterjee et al., 2026). They also reflect evidence that paternal emotional experiences can become especially intense when fathers confront conditions of uncertainty, helplessness, or disrupted expectations (Driant & Hamon, 2024). Although the circumstances of preterm birth differ from migration, both contexts can unsettle taken-for-granted paternal roles and require men to develop new ways of providing emotional support.

The participants' difficulty expressing vulnerability can also be understood through the relationship between masculinity ideology and parenting. Traditional masculinity often associates competence with control, independence, strength, and emotional restraint. Such beliefs may restrict fathers' psychological flexibility and make relational repair more difficult when parenting requires openness, apology, or adaptation (Zarling et al., 2025). In the present study, some fathers initially believed that emotional disclosure would undermine authority or transfer adult burdens to children. Others gradually distinguished between uncontrolled emotional exposure and emotionally responsible communication. This distinction supports the concept of caring masculinities, in which care, interdependence, empathy, and nonviolence are reconstructed as legitimate masculine practices rather than evidence of weakness (Nayak, 2023). The participants who followed a transformative relational trajectory were especially likely to reinterpret emotional openness as strength and to view listening, patience, and repair as forms of paternal responsibility. Their experiences also illustrate that caring practices are materially and spatially organized. Men's ability to participate emotionally depends on work schedules, housing conditions, migration status, family support, and access to time, not simply on individual willingness (Nayak, 2025). Emotional fatherhood should therefore not be presented as a personal choice detached

from the economic and institutional conditions that enable or constrain it.

The renegotiation of authority and everyday caregiving further demonstrated how migration changed the practical organization of fatherhood. Participants became more involved in cooking, school transportation, medical appointments, homework, bedtime routines, and recreational activities, partly because migration had removed the extended-family support networks available before migration and partly because dual-earner household arrangements required greater sharing of domestic responsibilities. These changes are consistent with contextual approaches emphasizing that father involvement is shaped by household arrangements, cultural expectations, and available social resources (Hoogar, 2026). For several participants, practical caregiving initially represented necessity rather than identity. Over time, however, routine involvement created greater emotional intimacy and enabled fathers to understand their children's personalities, difficulties, and developmental needs more fully. This finding supports the argument that fatherhood is constituted through repeated practices rather than only through beliefs or formal status.

Authority was also reconstructed through movement from command and obedience toward explanation, dialogue, negotiated boundaries, and consistency. This change was particularly visible in conflicts concerning adolescent autonomy, dating, clothing, friendships, digital media, academic decisions, and religious participation. Participants attempted to retain commitments to respect, responsibility, and cultural continuity while responding to children who had internalized Canadian norms of individual choice and open disagreement. This selective adaptation is consistent with integrative evidence indicating that immigrant parenting in Western societies typically involves negotiation rather than complete cultural replacement (Lee, 2026). Cross-cultural research likewise cautions against treating one culturally specific model of paternal authority as universally desirable (Li et al., 2021; Novianti et al., 2023). The negotiated hybrid trajectory identified in the present study illustrates this complexity. Fathers did not simply become more permissive; rather, they sought new justifications and relational methods for maintaining boundaries. Their uncertainty reflected the absence of a fully settled model that could reconcile inherited expectations of intergenerational respect with children's demands for autonomy.

The findings also showed that fatherhood reconstruction occurred through marital and institutional encounters.

Spouses often challenged fathers to participate more fully in domestic work, emotional labour, and shared decision-making. These negotiations could be experienced as threats to masculinity when participants understood provider status as the primary basis of paternal legitimacy. However, several fathers eventually described shared parenting as partnership rather than loss of authority. Such findings align with research showing that transnational and intercultural family life requires couples to renegotiate domestic responsibilities, belonging, and everyday expectations (Raja & Yang, 2025). Participants' interactions with schools, healthcare professionals, and settlement services also influenced their parenting. Institutional emphasis on communication, child development, and children's rights encouraged some fathers to reconsider disciplinary practices. Yet institutional encounters were not uniformly supportive. Language barriers, unfamiliar procedures, racialization, and stereotypes concerning immigrant men sometimes produced defensiveness and social marginalization. The findings therefore suggest that parenting adaptation is not solely a private family process. It is shaped by whether institutions recognize immigrant fathers as capable caregivers and provide culturally responsive opportunities for participation.

The importance of cultural continuity was especially evident in participants' concerns about heritage language, religion, family history, and relationships with grandparents. Fathers frequently interpreted these practices as means of preserving intergenerational belonging, while children did not always attach the same meaning to them. This tension corresponds with findings that heritage-language maintenance can carry strong emotional significance for migrant parents because it represents intimacy, continuity, and connection with relatives across borders (Rokita-Jaśkow & Panek, 2025). Cultural continuity was therefore not simply a matter of preserving tradition. It was part of fathers' attempts to ensure that migration did not sever children from family histories and moral obligations. Nevertheless, rigid enforcement could generate resistance, especially when children experienced cultural practices as externally imposed. Fathers who used storytelling, modelling, family visits, and voluntary participation appeared better able to connect cultural continuity with emotional closeness than those who relied primarily on authority.

Transnational family obligations were present in every participant's narrative and formed a central rather than peripheral dimension of fatherhood. Participants maintained relationships across borders through financial remittances, digital communication, remote caregiving, sponsorship,

participation in decisions, and responses to illness, conflict, or economic crisis. These findings support a practice-based understanding of transnational families as relationships continuously produced through communication, resource transfers, caregiving, and decision-making (Szyska, 2020). They also correspond with research showing that migrant fathers sustain parental and family involvement through creative practices despite geographical and legal separation (Roy & Yumiseva, 2021). In the present study, remittances were not merely economic transactions. They represented gratitude, loyalty, masculinity, filial responsibility, and continued inclusion in the family of origin. For some fathers, supporting relatives abroad restored a sense of competence weakened by occupational marginalization in Canada. However, remittances also reduced household savings, increased work demands, and generated disagreement with spouses or children.

Participants' experiences demonstrate that transnational care produces substantial emotional labor. Fathers monitored illness, mediated conflict, coordinated treatment, and responded to crises while attempting to remain available to children in Canada. Similar tensions between emotional distance and moral duty have been observed among Pakistani migrant fathers, for whom care across borders involves both material support and continuous management of guilt, worry, and responsibility (Haider, 2025). Transnational obligations also reflected broader family reconfigurations in which migration redistributes authority, care, and dependence across multiple households (Jaji, 2022). Some participants continued to be consulted on property, marriage, education, or caregiving decisions even when they lacked detailed knowledge of circumstances abroad. Others were expected to finance decisions because migration was interpreted as economic success. These expectations were reinforced by filial norms that continued to define adult children's obligations toward ageing parents despite physical distance (Han, 2022). Thus, participants' paternal identities could not be separated from their simultaneous identities as sons, brothers, sponsors, and distant caregivers.

The effects of geographical separation also help explain why fathers placed strong emphasis on maintaining emotional relationships through digital communication. Research with transnational families indicates that children may interpret paternal absence differently from fathers, whose narratives often emphasize sacrifice and provision (Verdezoto & Llanes, 2020). Children may experience longing, uncertainty, emotional distance, or ambivalence

even when migration improves material conditions. Parental emotional support may therefore remain more important to children's well-being than remittances alone (Shu, 2020). Adolescents living within migration-affected families can also develop complex representations of closeness, abandonment, and caregiving substitution (Jerves et al., 2020). The fathers in the present study who had children or close relatives abroad attempted to reduce these consequences through frequent calls and participation in family decisions. Nevertheless, digital presence could not fully substitute for embodied care, particularly during illness, developmental transitions, or family crises.

The findings further demonstrate that transnational fatherhood is structured by border regimes and legal systems. Sponsorship procedures, delayed reunification, insecure status, and financial eligibility requirements influenced participants' capacity to fulfil family obligations. This supports research showing that state definitions of legitimate family relationships determine which families can reunify and whose care relationships receive legal recognition (Bonjour & Diepenmaat, 2023). Transnational family formation is therefore produced through interaction between intimate commitments and state regulation (Haugen, 2022). Border restrictions may transform fatherhood into a prolonged practice of documentation, waiting, planning, and uncertain anticipation, as demonstrated in research on fathers separated by migration regimes (Lee & Macías-Ayala, 2024). Parents migrating without children similarly experience guilt, altered authority, and reliance on substitute caregivers (Larrinaga-Bidegain et al., 2024). These structural dimensions are important because they prevent the emotional and relational difficulties of transnational fatherhood from being interpreted solely as deficiencies in individual fathers.

5 Conclusion

The three narrative trajectories identified in this study show that migration did not lead all fathers toward the same outcome. Transformative relational reconstruction occurred when participants critically reconsidered inherited masculine norms and incorporated emotional openness, shared caregiving, and dialogical authority into their paternal identities. Negotiated hybrid reconstruction involved selective adaptation, with fathers preserving cultural values while revising methods of communication and discipline. Defensive provider-centered reassertion emerged when economic insecurity, perceived disrespect, or social

marginalization strengthened participants' attachment to authority, sacrifice, and emotional restraint. These trajectories help explain why migration may create both opportunities and risks for family relationships. Media and cultural representations increasingly normalize emotionally involved fatherhood (Afifulloh, 2022; Løfaldli, 2022), but fathers' ability to enact such ideals depends on whether they can integrate them into culturally meaningful identities and whether their material circumstances support relational involvement. The findings also challenge research that frames migrant parenting primarily through deficit and disruption (Juozeliūnienė et al., 2020). Although conflict, separation, and strain were evident, participants also demonstrated reflection, adaptability, and intentional efforts to develop forms of fatherhood that responded to children's needs across changing cultural environments. Fatherhood reconstruction was consequently a continuing process of moral and relational negotiation rather than a completed transition from one stable model to another.

This study had several limitations. The sample consisted of 18 immigrant fathers and was designed to generate in-depth narrative understanding rather than statistically generalizable conclusions. Although participants represented different countries of origin, migration pathways, provinces, and socioeconomic positions, the sample could not capture the full diversity of immigrant fatherhood in Canada. Fathers willing to participate in extended interviews may have been more reflective, more involved in parenting, or more comfortable discussing family relationships than fathers who declined participation. The use of one interview with each participant limited the ability to trace changes in narratives over time, and retrospective accounts may have been influenced by selective memory or participants' desire to present themselves as responsible fathers. Interviews conducted in different languages may also have involved subtle changes in meaning during translation, despite efforts to preserve conceptual equivalence. In addition, the study relied on fathers' accounts and did not include the perspectives of spouses, children, relatives abroad, or professionals who interacted with the families. The findings therefore represent fathers' interpretations of family change rather than a complete account of household dynamics.

Future research should examine the reconstruction of immigrant fatherhood through longitudinal and multi-informant designs. Following fathers from the premigration or early settlement period through later stages of family adaptation would clarify how masculine identity, caregiving,

authority, and emotional communication change over time. Studies should include spouses, children, grandparents, and relatives abroad to compare how different family members interpret paternal sacrifice, emotional availability, discipline, and transnational obligation. Larger comparative studies could investigate differences associated with migration pathway, racialization, socioeconomic status, religion, language, family structure, children's age, and length of residence in Canada. Greater attention should also be given to separated, divorced, remarried, refugee, undocumented, same-sex, and nonresident immigrant fathers, whose experiences may differ from those of married co-resident fathers. Research examining the influence of labor-market conditions, housing insecurity, immigration policy, sponsorship requirements, and digital communication would further connect individual narratives with the structural conditions shaping fatherhood.

Settlement agencies, family services, schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations should recognize immigrant fathers as active caregivers rather than approaching them only as economic providers or peripheral family members. Father-focused programs should create culturally safe opportunities for men to discuss occupational loss, parenting stress, emotional expression, marital negotiation, discipline, and transnational responsibilities without portraying cultural difference as deficiency. Programs should help fathers expand their models of provision to include emotional availability, shared caregiving, and relationship repair while respecting the importance many attach to responsibility, cultural continuity, and extended-family loyalty. Couple- and family-based services should address conflict surrounding remittances, household labor, children's autonomy, and heritage-language maintenance. Schools and healthcare systems should provide accessible communication, interpretation services, and direct invitations for fathers' participation. Practical support concerning employment, credential recognition, sponsorship, eldercare coordination, and financial planning may also improve parenting by reducing the structural pressures that limit fathers' time and emotional availability.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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