

Mother's perception of father's involvement in child care

M. DHRAKSHAYANI

Post Graduate Government College for Girls, Sector-11, Chandigarh (U.T.) India
(Email : sushaingoldy@yahoo.co.in)

ABSTRACT

Father's participation in child care has been ignited by the entry of women in paid labor force and by mounting evidence of father's role in overall development of the child. Women with young children are now the fastest growing segment of the female labor force. Caring for the young children is a demanding task and every father should share the responsibility of child care at this stage. With the fast changing family patterns and structures leading to the emergence of dual earner families, it becomes essential to study the role of today's fathers with respect to child care. 120 dual earner couples were interviewed on father's involvement in child care and mother's perception of father's involvement in child care. 60 dual earner couples were working during regular hours of work (Group-I) and remaining 60 couples, fathers were working during regular hours and mothers on shift system (Group-II). The data was collected through a developed and standardized rating scale. Two-way ANOVA was carried out to see the differences in mother's perception of father's involvement in child care. Percentages, means and standard deviations were computed to study father's involvement in all the nine categories of child care. Results revealed that there was no significant difference in mother's perception of father's involvement in child care between parents. However there was 1% level of significance between group-I and II category parents in all the childcare tasks other than Crèche/preschool related tasks.

Key Words : Child care tasks, Mother's perception, Father's involvement, Dual earner families

INTRODUCTION

There are culturally assigned roles for men and women in different societies of the world. In Indian society the women's role has traditionally been limited to the familial roles of a mother, wife or a home maker who is totally dependent for her sustenance on the male members of the family. The father's role was largely one of an educator, a disciplinarian and the breadwinner of the family. From more than two decades increasing number of women are getting jobs outside their homes and this trend has contributed to some redefinition of the father's role, especially in nuclear families. It has been observed in the present decade that fathers are increasingly involved in the lives of young children. The involvement of the fathers in child care can be attributed to many factors such as urbanization, modernization, increased role expectation, family mobility, lack of extended support and emergence of dual earner nuclear families. Thus we are seeing increasing number of fathers eager to play an active and important role in child rearing. More and more people today talk in terms of "androgynous parenting roles": that is roles that are similar in function. This new image of a father

differs from the older image of the father in several key aspects. The new father is present at birth of the child, takes care of the infant, participates in day to day work of child care and also plays a significant role in overall development of the child. But, how do mothers perceive this? This part of the study is neglected. There is very little research carried out to show how mothers perceive fathers involvement in child care.

Review of literature :

Fathers should not be exempted from child care activities, they should be involved in various aspects of child care according to their competence (Apollo, 2009). Father's participation in child care appears to influence mother's beliefs about father's role in child care (Bonney *et al.*, Mc Bride *et al.*, 2005). Mother's perception of father's involvement mainly depends on the mother's attitude towards male role in the family (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Barunelli, 1995). Mothers were very much satisfied with the kind of help provided by fathers (Belsky and Rovine, 1988; Benin and Agostinelli, 1988; Biernat and Wortman, 1991; Pruett, 1993; Yougev and Brett, 1985). This is because some husbands performed almost as many child care tasks as their wives (Coltrane, 1996). Mothers assumed that the fathers should participate in 1/3 of the child care tasks which will release the work load of mother, (Lamb *et al.*, 1985-86) reduces maternal stress, (Fagan, 1996) physical and mental stress (Dulac, 1994) and relieves strain (Kimball, 1988) for the mother. Research indicates that fathers who perceive their wives as evaluating them positively as fathers were more likely to report higher levels of involvement in child-related activities and place greater importance on the father role identity which was, in turn, associated with higher levels of involvement (Pasely *et al.*, 2002). On the contrary, mothers serve as "Gatekeepers" to father's relationships with their children limiting fathers involvement in child care (Allen and Hawkins, 1999).

Baruch and Barnett's (1986) study reveals that father's involvement in child care is in the form of secondary "helper" role and still the mother has to plan and supervise the child care tasks. Thompson and Walker (1989) consider that still women's work is worrisome, tiresome, repetitive, isolating, unfinished, inescapable and often unappreciated. Berardo *et al.* (1987) argue that in the area of child care men still rely on their wives to assign tasks rather than taking responsibility on their own.

Even when husbands share child care, parenting responsibility do not diminish in importance for wife (Gloria and Ford, 1985) and working women experienced a great deal of time pressure and work over load (Purnima, 1990). As a result, working women reported that they were not able to give as much care to their children as they want (Thompson and Walker, 1989) and they felt they were not good parents (Biernat and Wortman, 1991).

The current study:

In Indian context research on mothers perception towards fathers involvement in child care was not given due importance. The following study is carried out to explore the mother's perception of father's involvement in child care with the following objectives:

- (1) To find out the actual involvement of fathers in various child care categories.
- (2) To study the mothers perception of fathers involvement in child care.
- (3) To offer a comparison between group-I and group-II categories.

METHODOLOGY

120 dual earner couples and their 0-3 year children were recruited from middle class urban families in Andhra Pradesh from Hyderabad. Of this, 60 dual earner couples were working during regular hours of work (Group I) and the remaining 60 dual earner couples fathers were working during regular hours and mothers on shift system (Group II). Children below 3 years were selected as father's

involvement is critically more important when the children are at the young end of the age range and decreases as the children mature, presumably growing in independence. Middle income Indian families were selected because of their economic and financial position they have limited access to the resources. They struggle for survival and are likely to be more egalitarian. Hence the responsibilities have to be achieved within the family by mutual sharing of tasks.

Maximum percentage (93.33%) of the fathers and mothers (85.83%) were above 27 years of age and 82 per cent of them had single child. About 50 per cent of mothers were graduates and fathers were postgraduates. Father's income was higher when compared to mothers. However fathers spend less time (10 hours per day) at home than mothers (12 hours per day). 65 per cent of the couples were married for 3 to 4 years.

After going through the exhaustive literature on child care a rating scale constituting 102 child care tasks categorized under 10 child care components were developed by the investigator. The developed rating scale was given to a panel of 20 judges who were professionals in the field of child development to obtain the content validity of the rating scale. After passing the rating scale to the panel and collecting the information finally 81 child care tasks categorized under 9 major child care components were selected to study father's involvement in child care. The nine child care components include (a) attending to the physical needs of the child (b) tasks related to cleanliness (c) food related tasks (d) health needs (e) cognitive needs (f) behavioral needs (g) emotional needs (h) social needs (i) crèche / preschool related tasks. Each major child care component consists of 9 related child care tasks that were performed by the father. Each child care task was categorized based on how frequently the father was involved in child care *i.e.* always, often, sometimes, rarely and never and were scored as 5,4,3,2 and 1.

The reliability of the scale was obtained by test and retest method. The correlation coefficient was ranging from .85 to .89. The 'r' values were significant at 0.01 level probability indicating that the rating scale was highly suitable for administering it to fathers as the scale was stable and dependable in its measurement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The selected sample was interviewed at home. The rating scale on father's involvement in child care was administered to study the actual involvement of fathers in 9 child care categories. After obtaining the information from fathers, the mothers was also asked to rate the father's involvement in nine child care categories they perceived the fathers were involved. The data was correlated with the father's actual involvement in nine childcare categories. The scores obtained from fathers and mothers were compiled and two way ANOVA was carried out to see the differences in mother's perception of father's involvement in child care of group I and group II category. Percentages, means and standard deviations were computed to study father's involvement in all the nine categories of child care. For better understanding results in this paper are discussed using percentages.

Perception of mothers towards fathers involvement in child care :

When a comparison was made with the scores obtained by the fathers on their actual involvement in nine child care categories with that of mother's perception it has been observed that there was no significant difference between the mother's perception of the father's involvement in child care within group I and II categories. F calculated value was significant between groups, hence it can be said that there is statistical difference between group I and group II categories of fathers in attending to the nine child care categories. Surprisingly this area of research has been not given due importance by the researchers since decades.

Significant difference was observed between the group-I and II categories of fathers in their

Table: 1 Mean difference in mother's perception of father's involvement in various child care categories (Total mean score in each category-45)

Sr. No.	Child care categories	Group-I						Group-II						Analysis of variance	
		Mean			S.D			Mean			S.D			Between parents	Between groups
		Mothers (n=60)	Fathers (n=60)												
1.	Physical needs of the child	20.683	20.700	5.478	5.512	25.600	25.700	5.944	5.915	0.006	INS	45.1371**			
2.	Tasks related to cleanliness	17.133	17.167	5.034	4.944	23.267	23.133	5.886	5.579	0.005	INS	76.0188**			
3.	Food related tasks	21.966	21.833	5.035	5.019	25.933	26.117	5.839	6.048	0.001	INS	33.6876**			
4.	Health needs	27.800	28.717	5.398	4.826	30.550	30.583	5.482	5.237	0.492	INS	11.6336**			
5.	Social needs	29.617	29.467	6.948	6.873	34.850	35.083	5.656	5.537	0.002	INS	44.6599**			
6.	Cognitive needs	28.200	28.200	9.063	9.070	34.350	34.000	7.787	7.702	0.025	INS	30.1319**			
7.	Emotional needs	30.217	30.100	7.100	7.225	35.417	35.633	6.877	6.558	0.003	INS	35.8303**			
8.	Behaviour control	23.467	23.433	7.696	7.347	30.633	30.550	6.486	6.813	0.003	INS	60.6812**			
9.	Crèche/Pre-school related tasks	29.350	28.883	7.199	7.477	30.333	30.850	6.925	7.295	0.000	INS	2.4993NS			

** : Significant at 1% level
 NS: Not significant

involvement in child care. When compared to group-I category of fathers, group-II fathers were more involved in all the child care categories except crèche / pre-school related tasks. One of the mothers explained:

“Even though my husband is involved in all the aspects of child care, parenting responsibility did not diminish for me, I experience the same work load and strain always.”

It has been analyzed from the present study that 60 per cent of the mothers felt that fathers were less involved in terms of meeting the physical needs such as bathing, dressing, attending to the toilet needs, putting the child to bed etc. Only 40 per cent of the fathers from group-I and 53 per cent from group-II in the present study were involved in meeting the physical needs of the child. So it is apparent that it was not only the mother's perception but also when it came to actual involvement it was the same. Only 35 per cent of the fathers in group-I as compared to 50 per cent in group-II were meeting the ‘tasks related to cleanliness.’ Some of the mothers commented that: *“fathers were least involved in washing and drying the clothes of the child, changing the diapers of the child, cutting nails and cleaning ears”*. This shows that still 50 per cent of the fathers view tasks related to cleanliness as a women's chore. However, there was no significant difference in mother's perception of father's involvement in meeting the tasks related to cleanliness in both the categories.

More than 50 per cent of the mothers in the present study still viewed kitchen is their place of work. Wherein majority of the tasks related to meeting the “food needs” of the child was carried out by the mothers. If at all fathers were involved in meeting the food needs, it was just concerned with the supervision of the child while eating or purchasing snacks for a child. The same was observed by the fathers of group-I and II categories. Surprisingly 60 percent of fathers from group II category were involved in *“suggesting what type of food should be given to the child”*. About 60 per cent of the mother's perceived that the fathers are becoming responsible in meeting the “health needs” of the child, when the child was sick / hospitalized / to be vaccinated. Only 40 per cent of the mothers viewed meeting the health needs of the child was their province. These differences were mainly observed between group-I and II categories of mothers. Fathers from both the categories were ready to apply leave to their job to take care of the sick child at home. But one of the fathers was of the view that *“mothers are more careful in handling the sick child as they have more patience”*.

Sixty five per cent of the fathers were meeting the “social needs” of the child. That is fathers were more involved in playing with the child, taking the child for outings and were interacting with the child whenever necessary. Ninety five percent of fathers were involved in “celebrating birthday parties” in both the categories. However, mothers of the present study were of the opinion that *“fathers were meeting the social needs of the child only when the mother was busy or when she was on duty”* in group-II category. About 60 percent of the mother's perceived that fathers were involved in meeting the “cognitive needs” of the child. Fathers of the present study were engaged with the child in solving puzzles, holding discussions, helping the child in studies and encouraged the child to do its own task. However 40 per cent of the mothers perceived that meeting the cognitive needs of the child was women chore. One of the mothers from group II explained that *“my husband works long hours to support the family; he is exhausted by the end of the day. Hence it is not fair for me to expect him to be involved with the child. But I am sure he would help me when I need him the most.”*

Seventy five per cent of the mothers viewed meeting the “emotional needs” of the child was done by the fathers, which is in agreement with the present study findings. 72 per cent of the fathers were actually involved in meeting the emotional needs of the child such as attending to the crying child, comforting the distressed child during night etc. The same was observed by group-I and II categories of mothers. One of the distressed mothers was of the opinion the *“he just can't understand the expressive feelings of the child, I can better handle the child, and it is not his piece of work”*. About 50 per cent of group-I and 40 per cent of group-II mothers perceived that fathers were good in “controlling the behaviour” of the child. Fathers were involved in checking the bad habits of the child,

controlling the child, helping the child in habit formation and deciding the reward and punishment for the child's behaviour. That is, the instrumental task of controlling the behaviour of the child was under the control of the fathers as perceived by the mothers. One of the father explained "running a family is not an easy task. It needs the cooperation and support of both the spouses. We work for each other and for the child, my wife is a wonderful lady, so I involve myself in all the household activities".

Significant difference was not observed in performance of fathers in crèche/preschool related tasks between and within the groups. 60-70 per cent of the mothers from both the categories handed over the "crèche/pre-school related tasks" to the fathers. It was not only the mother's perception, but when it came to actual involvement also fathers were doing their level best in meeting the crèche/pre-school related tasks of the child. However, still 30-40 per cent of the mothers in the present study had to manage with the crèche/pre-school related tasks of the child.

From the above discussion it can be said that mothers perceived that fathers did contribute significantly to a number of home chores, and their involvement in child care was quite high in the areas of social, emotional, cognitive, behaviour and crèche/pre-school related tasks of the child. This shows that fathers are meeting the requirement of child care which is expected by the mothers. But fathers involvement was comparatively less in strictly traditional female oriented tasks such as attending to the physical needs, food related tasks and tasks related to cleanliness. Surprisingly in none of the tasks were fathers the sole primary care providers.

Way out :

Not just "parenting" but "co-parenting" has come into being *i.e.* equal sharing of parenting responsibility by mother and father. But the complete involvement of father in child care will become wild reality only if we encourage and give a chance to fathers to involve themselves in child care. This is beneficial not only for the child but also for the mother and father.

The study will be an eye opener for the fathers, to see their present position in the involvement of child care, especially when the mother is working during shift system of work and as a result may increase their participation in child care. Based on the results obtained from the present study an intervention programme can be carried out for the fathers, to enhance better involvement of father in child care activities. These findings can be used to guide family life and parent educators as they attempt to develop programmes specifically for fathers, which are aimed at helping fathers to meet the new emerging personal and societal specifications for paternal involvement. Counselors, therapists, scholars and representatives need to acknowledge and support the progress already made by fathers as they continue to move in this direction, and should present a balance picture of "new fatherhood".

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