

Paternal involvement in child rearing tasks of pre-school children: an assessment

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Abstract

The world began to radically change with the social, economic and technical changes of the 21st Century and with those changes came a basic change in the structure and function of the family with a consequent shift in the authority of the father. At present, the socio-cultural changes have marked an increase in interest regarding fatherhood and the role of fathers in families. The present study was undertaken with an attempt to assess the level of father's involvement in child rearing activities of their preschool children by using Paternal Involvement Inventory constructed by Singh (2007). The involvement was assessed under three major categories i.e. Grooming, Sustaining the learning and Future Orientation. The total sample consisted of 120 fathers residing in Udaipur city having children under the age group of 2-6 years as their eldest offspring. The results showed that fathers were highly involved in promoting health related tasks and physical skills and moderately involved in promoting emotional skills among preschool children. This indicates an improvement in paternal involvement as compared to the last few decades when the researches mainly focused on the maternal involvement in child rearing and mother-child relationships. From recent studies on Paternal Involvement it is evident that time spent with fathers is important for children throughout their early years. But, still the researches on parenting do not place much importance to the concept of fatherhood. Therefore, the present study is a small attempt to contribute in this particular area.

Keywords: Fathers, Involvement, Preschool children, Child rearing tasks.

Introduction

A child's first interaction to the world is established through his mother, or in a broader sense, his parents. The child tries to learn and imbibe the things he observes in his parents. Thus, a parent-child relationship lays the foundation to build a strong and healthy environment for a child to grow and develop in a positive manner.

A good upbringing directly influences the development of a child. As per the present scenario, the process of industrialization, urbanization and modernization has brought about various socio-cultural changes in the attitudes of the male counterpart of the society towards parental roles and responsibilities. Fathers today, do not limit themselves as being the 'breadwinner' of the family' but are showing androgynous behaviors and reflecting a healthy trend of gender equality.

The society has gone through a great many phases and changes in the relations of parents and children since the past few years such as changes in family structure where the traditional joint family system is breaking down into nuclear families and entry of women into workforce. These changes have brought about a change in gender roles and there is a growing interest in the role of fathers in their children's lives following years of neglect when the spotlight was focused firmly on the mothers' role. Fathers today are equally interested in contributing towards children's development and rearing.

Researchers say that 'Fathers, like mothers, play a very important role in young children's lives. Active involvement of fathers results in better educational, psychological and social development of children. Also time spent with fathers is important for children throughout their early years. It is a general observation that children, who spend quality time with their fathers, develop better relationships with their friends, do better at school and in their exams, are less likely to come into conflict with the societal laws and be involved in crime and are happier in comparison to the children with uninvolved fathers¹.

Results of a study say, 'Father's have gotten least importance in the research on parents and children, much of which historically has focused on mothers as primary caregivers. Changing economic and employment patterns including the migration of people to urban areas for the sake of livelihood and rise in population of employed mother, as well as transformations in societal attitudes towards fatherhood and gendered family roles have resulted in a greater call for fathers to actively participate in child care and family life².

According to a study, the role of fathers becomes multi-dimensional with the entry of the child into the family. Providing a helping hand to their wives and active engagement with children are now as much a part of fathering as being the provider. Fathers' earnings become more significant around the birth of their child, when many mothers reduce their working

hours or withdraw from employment while their child is young. So modern fathers are maintaining a balance between meeting the increased financial responsibility for the family and to develop a close, warm, involved relationship with their baby³.

According to a study it is concluded that despite significant increases in paternal involvement in recent decades, fathers still spend considerably less time in parenting activities as compared to mothers, with variability in involvement across families⁴.

Till recently research studies did not place much importance on the role of the father, and his influence on the development and growth of his child was reported as "insignificant". Parent was often the same as mother and father, if mentioned, was equivalent to other influences. Only a small number of parent-child studies investigated the father's role, and the few studies that were done at that time focused on the father's involvement as reported by the mothers.

Due to changing social conditions, both the desire and demand for father involvement is high in Indian society. Indian fathers, the majority of whom are moderately involved, can play a key role in ensuring the healthy development of their children by increasing their involvement in the right direction. Demands on fathers to participate more actively in the rearing and socialization of their children have existed for some decades. These demands, nonetheless, have intensified in recent years across all social sectors.

Now a day, young fathers generally help mothers with child rearing, particularly during the first months and years of the child. However, researches regarding gender differences in parenting are still lacking. Against this backdrop, the study envisaged with the following objective: i. To assess the level of father's involvement in selected child rearing tasks of male and female preschool children.

An indirect result of the lack of research data on fathers was the implied assumption that fathers weren't interested in fathering. These days, neither the general public nor the researchers working on families, see the father as equivalent to "other influences" that contribute towards positive development of children. In our country, researches in this field still remain to be inconclusive and controversial. Therefore, the present study is a small attempt to make a contribution in this particular area.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in Udaipur, a city of Rajasthan to find out the involvement of fathers in child rearing activities of their children (both boys and girls). The sample consisted of 120 fathers having children belonging to preschool age i.e. under 2-6 years as their eldest offspring.

The investigator approached the selected respondents (fathers of preschool children) in various localities of Udaipur.

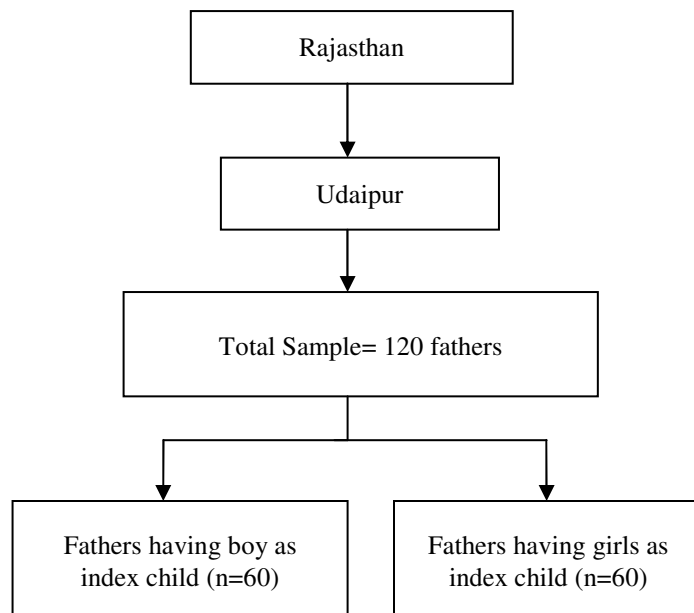


Figure-1: Distribution of the sample.

Researcher used two tools for data collection: i. Background Information Proforma: The proforma was used to get the information about the personal, professional and familial details of selected samples which have direct or indirect bearing on major variables of the study Singh⁵. ii. Paternal Involvement Inventory: Paternal involvement inventory was used by the investigator to assess fathers' involvement in child rearing tasks of their 2-6 years old children. The inventory consists of close-ended questions, seeking responses on direct involvement of fathers on four point scale regarding selected child rearing tasks Singh⁵.

The specific child rearing tasks included in the Paternal Involvement Inventory are given in Table-1.

Table-1: Childrearing tasks of preschool children (2-6 years).

S. No.	Child rearing tasks of preschool children	No. of Items
1.	Health promoting tasks	14
2.	Tasks promoting physical skills	8
3.	Tasks pertaining to satisfaction of emotional needs	6
	Total items	28

Scoring, Coding and categorization of level of paternal involvement in child rearing tasks: For the assessment of the level of paternal involvement in child rearing task, each item in the inventory had four options which were scored as per the details given in Table-2.

Table-2: Details of the scoring pattern of the Paternal Involvement Inventory.

Positive items	Scores	Negative items	Scores
Always(A)	4	Always(A)	1
Sometimes(S)	3	Sometimes(S)	2
Rarely(R)	2	Rarely(R)	3
Never (N)	1	Never (N)	4

The subjects opted any one option out of four options for each item. Total scores were than computed by adding the scores obtained by the subjects at all the three aspect of involvement. The maximum score for each item was 4 and minimum score was 1. The subjects with maximum score were categorized to have maximum involvement. Mean scores for each child rearing task were calculated by dividing these total scores of each child rearing task by the number of items of that particular child rearing task separately for all the three aspects of involvement in child rearing task viz. grooming, sustaining the learning and future orientation. Consequently, the mean scores for the level of paternal involvement were as follows:

High involvement	-	3.1 - 4.00
Medium involvement	-	1.6 - 3.00
Low involvement	-	1.00 - 1.5

Percentage distribution was done for the subjects considering each category of child rearing task (health needs, physical skills and emotional needs).

Results and discussion

There are a number of factors that influence the degree to which fathers are involved with their children. As studied by fathers

with more gender egalitarian practices are actively involved in parenting especially with children under preschool age⁶.

Scholars have suggested that gender inequalities in child care might be reduced when women are employed as maternal employment may bring fathers to compensate for their wives' time pressures by increasing the child care output for children of both the sexes⁷.

The results of the present study as well as relevant discussions have been presented under the following subheads:

Socio-personal characteristics of the respondents: In every study, it is essential to know the background information in which the research investigation has been conducted as the personal and familial details of the respondents bring out their characteristic features.

At the time of present investigation majority of the fathers belonged to the age group of 25-35 years with good educational qualifications i.e. graduates and occupationally placed at government sectors having at annual family income under the range of Rs. 2,00,000 to 4,90,000. 60 per cent fathers of male preschool and 63.4 per cent fathers of the female preschool child were having children less than 2-4 years of age. Majority of the wives were not working although they were well educated i.e. graduates.

Assessment of the level of father's involvement in selected child rearing tasks of male and female preschool children: Table-3, depicts the level of father's involvement in selected child rearing tasks of male and female preschool children.

Table-3: Percentage distribution of the level of Paternal involvement in selected child rearing tasks of male and female preschool children
N=120

S.No.	Child Rearing Task	Level of involvement	Grooming		Sustaining the learning		Future Orientation	
			Boys (n=60)	Girls (n=60)	Boys (n=60)	Girls (n=60)	Boys (n=60)	Girls (n=60)
1.	Healthy habits	High	96.5	89.5	94.5	89.5	95	88
		Medium	3.3	8.3	3.34	10.5	3.34	3.34
		Low	-	1.67	1.67	-	1.67	86.5
3.	Physical Skills	High	96.5	95	86.5	91.5	80	68
		Medium	3.34	5	10.8	8.3	20	11.67
		Low	-	-	2.5	-	-	20
4.	Emotional Needs	High	54.5	54.5	88	83	68	78
		Medium	45	45	11.67	16.67	28.33	15
		Low	-	-	-	-	3.34	6.67

From Table-3, it can be concluded that fathers of preschool boys and girls were found to be highly involved in promoting healthy habit which is in line with the study conducted by who reported that fathers think it is their duty to create a conducive environment for their children's growth and address their children's health needs⁸. High involvement was also observed in promoting age appropriate physical skills. Moderate involvement was observed in grooming aspect of promotion of age appropriate emotional needs. Moderate involvement was also observed in fathers of preschool boys regarding future orientation aspect of promoting age appropriate emotional skills. Mother and fathers are both important in proper development of children; therefore, gender role redefinition in parental role is required instead of lamenting the passing of the good provider model and trying to reclaim a nostalgic vision of responsible fathers and soft patriarchy. It is important to study and promote a wide range of fathering styles and focusing on those activities that reflect a healthy trend of gender equality.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings it is indicated that Indian fathers are ready to participate in any activities which are related to family life. Their role has consequently changed and even in the family they are showing concern by participating in activities like promoting healthy habits, promoting age appropriate physical skills and fulfilling the emotional needs that were once considered as prime responsibilities of mothers. Fathers at present are equally involved in child rearing activities of children belonging to both the sexes (i.e. boys and girls) showing androgynous behavior and reflecting a healthy trend of gender equality. Fathers are emerging as an active participant in raising children and providing a unique contribution to the development of the children.

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