



Issues and challenges of child rearing in an urban marginalized community in Assam, India

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Abstract

A study was conducted in an urban marginalized community residing in Duliajan of Dibrugarh District, Assam to know the issues and challenges they faced on upbringing of their children. They are mixed people and earned their livelihood by engaging themselves as daily wagers in different types of jobs. Due to hike of prices of essential commodities day by day, most of the respondents expressed their feeling of inability to sustain their livelihood. Among the children, the immunization coverage was not satisfactory as a large number of respondents did not complete or continue the immunization schedule as per Government guideline and only a few completed or are continuing it. This may be the lack of awareness of the parents or may be non involvement in the process of nurturing of their children actively. As the respondents have to pass a stressful parenting process due to poverty and deprivation, these things regarding immunization of their children becomes less important. The sufferings of their children from different diseases like Anaemia due to malnutrition and helminthic infections, diarrhea and other stomach problems and different skin diseases for staying in non hygienic conditions are very common. The children of poor families have been given the opportunity to admit in government schools free of cost, but even then the rate of school dropout children seems to be high among these communities due to inadequacy of some other resources. Due to illiteracy, ignorance and clutch of poverty, the respondents were found to show some inclination towards sending their children for different small jobs for earning instead of sending their children to the school. The negligence of parents to girl child was also observed. All the respondents felt uncertainty, discouragement in every step and extreme financial hardship due to ongoing covid-19 pandemic to provide basic cares of their child. Alcoholism and other familial problems are also the reasons to lose the coordination among many families in the community; as a consequence their financial crisis tends to be worst, thereby disrupting the proper parenting process. All respondents were found ignorant about the child right. Awareness is essential among these illiterate people about the rights of child - how to explore these and to take up facilities during their childhood as government has different schemes to facilitate child development.

Keywords: Marginalized, child rearing, issues and challenges, immunization, diseases, illiteracy, poverty.

Introduction

The present topic of study is an attempt to explore the difficulties faced by a downtrodden community on upbringing of their children. Upbringing of a child is a long process how his or her parents use to raise him or her from birth to adult providing all the necessary requirements of a childhood period. Childhood which requires some social and structural positions may be different from one community to another and therefore, it depends on where a child is growing up. It is simply thought in today's society that childhood is an way to reach adult from infant. A child is used to get experiences of the society where he or she is grown up. If a child is exposed to physical violence at home, he starts losing all sorts of comforts of a care taking family¹. A street child's life begins on street and always try to survive on street. The living environment of street children is full of insecurity and difficulties and they are often exposed to drug abuse, violence, crime, family disruption, abandonment, prostitution, different types of ailments etc.².

Nowadays in changing society, the families are losing many associated social functions because familial concept has changed from joint to nuclear family. In nuclear family, the parents face various types of problem in fostering their children and this could be managed earlier in joint family. The fostering of a child properly is not an easy task. It is somewhat expensive and difficult to manage even for middle class families. In families of below poverty line, the process of bringing up of their children becomes very difficult. These families do not realize it deeply or they do not take it sincerely as most of them are illiterate. In addition, these families have more number of children in comparison to that of cultured families. In this type of situation, the children face negligence from their parents which has led to develop the process of marginalization of children within the families. So the children of very low socio-economic group experiencing poor or no social supports from the families or from the society are always at risk of poor health as well as developmental outcomes and are exposed to anti-social activities.

The child care is an important process and mothers are the main persons to play significant role in rearing of their children taking all types of care for their proper growth, development and change of behaviour etc. In economically very poor families, it is often observed that the parents go to work and their daughters (elders) use to take care of their younger siblings and this situation compels the elder child to remain absent in school. The factors which are responsible for child development are the home environmental conditions, economic status of the families, parent's education, their attitudes, knowledge and opportunities received from the government.

Despite the severity of poverty, it is observed that more than 70% of the children among poor families use to enroll in school particularly after the implementation of the Right to education Act in India in 2009 which facilitates free education to the children up to the age of 14 years irrespective of children of rural or urban areas belonging to poor, backward, marginalized communities³. Although all these socio- economically backward communities are getting the opportunity to admit their children in government schools free of cost, even then it is observed that there is considerably a large number of school dropout children and this remains a problem among these communities for some other reasons.

In the present study carried out in a community which is deprived of the adequate resources as required for managing their livelihood, it has been tried to depict the different issues and challenges as faced by the families for bringing up their children in their schedule of their daily life.

Methodology

Study area: The study was carried out in an urban marginalized community in Duliajan of Dibrugarh District, Assam. They are mixed people of different religion and mostly are daily wage workers to earn their livelihood. They are economically poor people.

Survey: The visits were made in the study area to collect the information required for the study. In the first visit, the community head person was contacted to know the information about the number of households/families and population of the area i.e. enumeration of households. After getting the information about number of families or population, the sampling technique was chosen.

Sampling: Systematic random sampling had been chosen to select samples at a particular preset interval. In order to fix the sampling interval, the total number of households/population in the study area was divided by the number of households/population to be undertaken for the study. Accordingly the researcher selected a random starting point between 1 and the sampling interval to set up a systematic random sampling for getting a representative sample of the study population statistically.

There are about 90 families in the community and 30 families were taken for the survey. As per calculation ($90/30=3$) i.e. every 3rd house of the community had been taken for the survey. The methodology had been applied for collecting data on qualitative and quantitative aspects through a predesigned interview schedule. Qualitative method was given priority in this research and the quantitative aspect was used to enrich the understanding of the qualitative data.

Exclusion criteria: If the random selected household was found without a child, this household had been discarded and next household was taken.

Results and discussion

In this study 30 respondents of 30 families in the studied community in urban area in Duliajan, Assam were taken. Majority of respondents are Hindus (26 nos), Muslim only 3 and 1 is of Christianity religion. As per age distribution, 5 respondents are in the age group 20-30, 18 are in 31-40, 5 in age group 41-50 and 2 in 51-60 age group. From the educational point of view, most of the respondents were found illiterate. Only 10 respondents read up to primary and 2 respondents read up to class VIII level. Not a single respondent was found to be 10th passed. Six respondents were in family size 1-3 group, 17 in 1-4 group, 6 in 1-5 and 1 was in 1-6 family size groups. The respondents were not permanently absorbed. The most of the respondents were found to engage in daily wage workers in different jobs. Their weekly income on an average Rs.1000-1200 per week. From the responses of the community people, it was known that their major problem was the financial hardship due to which they could not afford to provide the basic requirements of children. From birth of a child to its complete childhood period, there is a great need to give proper attention towards its nutritious food items, health care and other important cares. This proper process of nurturing of a child involves lots of effort and money. Due to price hike of all the commodities, they were unable to cope up with the situation with the inadequate money they received after working as daily wage workers. The people of meager income group always face difficulties in affording all the requirement of their child development. In the present study, most of the respondents expressed their feeling of inability to sustain their livelihood due to deprivation, poverty. Our study is in conformity with the earlier studies that poverty and deprivation are the major hurdles faced by such type of people. These two factors pose risk for developing mental stress upon parents leading to impairment of parenting process⁴ and in addition disruptions in parents' mental health also⁵.

The education status of Children: The Table-1 has shown the number of male and female children of the respondents and their age distribution. The Table-2 depicts the education status of the children.

A total of 35 numbers of children were found to admit in government schools, 21 children were in primary and 14 children were in high school level and 10 children were found as dropout from school. It seems as a problem among the families who were not interested or involved in child education. The perception of parents in this regard plays a significant role in children education. Illiteracy of the parents is a great hindrance in achieving their child development. Due to illiteracy, ignorance and clutch of poverty, the respondents were found to show some inclination towards sending their children for different small jobs for earning nearby their locality instead of sending their children to the school. As per UNICEF, one in every 10 children is found to involve in child labour because their families use to face some financial hardship and insecurity. As a result, their children become the victim of slavery, sexual and economic exploitation and this condition restricts their fundamental rights and threatens their future. A few respondents also gave preference for sending girl child to small jobs rather than sending them to school discouraging the importance of girl education. It depicts a mindedness of those respondents towards gender discrimination. In developing countries, the gender difference is always observed in child schooling. Initially the rate of school enrollment for both male and female children is high but subsequently, the number of absentee in schools among female children and their dropout rate is found to increase significantly. It is commonly seen in some countries that the number of female school drop-out students surpasses always the male number⁶.

Table-1: Numbers, gender and age structure of the children.

Age	Male	Female
0-2yrs	6	6
2-5yrs	9	8
5-10yrs	9	9
10-15yrs	7	8

Table-2: Status of school going children.

Primary		High School		Dropout	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
12	9	6	8	4	6

Involvement of respondents on children’s nurturing and education: From the point of involvement of respondents on their children’s nurturing and education, it was found that only 23.3% were fully interested on nurturing of their children, 30% moderately interested and majority 46.6% was found to have no involvement in nurturing. Similarly, in child education also only 33.3% respondents liked to involve whereas 33.3% moderately involved and 33.3% was not found to involve in child education

(Table-3). This condition depicts that in absence of proper improvement of the economic status of the people and social awareness in the community, the school dropout problem will remain same in these communities. As the parents are less educated and maximum are illiterate and have no time to look into the educational aspects of their children or have no understanding/idea how to guide their children, they do not realize the importance of education. The respondents are not at all aware that their children should get quality education during their childhood so as to lead their career. Poverty and the related difficulties have always adverse impact on the lives of children. In all economically poor communities, the children schooling patterns such as school admission, school attendance, repetition in same class and significant drop out rate are very common phenomena⁷.

Table-3: Involvement of the respondents on children’s nurturing and education.

	Full	Moderate	Nil
Nurturing	7 (23.3%)	9 (30.0%)	14 (46.6%)
Education	10 (33.3%)	10 (33.3%)	10 (33.3%)

Children’s health status: The respondents were asked whether their children were vaccinated/immunized or not as per Govt. guidelines. The information as given in the Table-4 depicts that immunization coverage of their children is very poor. 43.3% respondents did not complete or continue the immunization as per schedule and only 56.6% respondents could complete or are continuing immunization of their children. Different ailments of their children as faced by the respondents determined on the basis of self reporting are diarrhea/stomach problem, anaemia, helminthic infections and different skin diseases. Anaemia due to malnutrition and helminthic infections, stomach problem/diarrhea along with different skin diseases for not maintaining hygienic living conditions, are common ailments prevalent among their children (Table-4). Studies conducted in Dibrugarh district in urban and rural areas also reported high prevalence of multiple helminthic infections in children⁸ and malnutrition, worm infestations and skin diseases among poor communities⁹. The community people also find difficulty in attaining medical aids for their children and cannot afford to purchase medicines on time. As a result, the suffering of their children does not end rather it aggravates. The poverty and poverty related stress have direct effect on parents and pose indirect impact on child development impairing parenting practices. The illiteracy and ignorance of the respondents (80%) are also the foremost reasons for which they are unable to understand the situation and to explore the facilities or opportunities as provided by the government time to time for the people below poverty line. The lack of awareness among the community creates difficulties which they cannot escape and ultimately get deprived of the opportunities provided through different government schemes.

No knowledge in them about immunization related aspects of their children that can prevent many diseases in their childhood and as such a large number of children are left with incomplete coverage of immunization schedule. This type of neglect or unawareness along with their non hygienic living conditions causes sufferings of their children from different ailments. Ignorance, lack of faith, lack of parent’s education, awareness particularly of mother are the main reasons for low immunization coverage in their children. As per National Family Health survey also, low immunization coverage (40%) was observed even in urban areas. It may be due to the factors like difficulties in assessing services eg. physical distance to clinics, quality of services etc.¹⁰.

Table-4: Immunization coverage and health status of the children as per respondents.

Immunization		Completed/ continuing		Incomplete/ discontinued
		17 (56.6%)		
Ailments	Anemia	Helminthic Infection	Stomach problem	Skin disease
	7 (23.3%)	20 (66.6%)	25 (83.3%)	12 (40.0%)

Perception of respondents: The respondents were asked about the reasons or difficulties they faced during upbringing of their children and the possible information received from the respondents are given in Table-5. Most of the respondents (93.3 %) informed that they faced financial scarcity as a main problem due to which they cannot afford to provide all the requirements of children. Due to price hike of all the commodities, they are unable to cope up with the situation with the inadequate money they receive after working as daily wage workers. The illiteracy and ignorance of the respondents (80%) were also the reasons for which they were unable to understand the situation and to explore the facilities or opportunities as provided by the government time to time for the people below poverty line. After interviewing with the respondents, it was also observed that a large number of them (26.6%) had familial disturbance due to financial problem, alcoholism in family, wrangle or quarrel in the family. These types of disturbances create non-participation among family members which have adverse effect on the process of nurturing of children and their development. There is always an effect of environment in which a child grows up. If the child’s parents are alcohol addicted, this environment poses a great risk for their children to become addicted. The environment in which a child grows up can have a serious effect on them. Alcoholism in the family and other familial problems are the reasons to lose the coordination among family members and as a consequence their financial crisis tends to be worst. It seems to be a common problem encountered by many families in the community.

A few respondents (20%) showed negligence to the girl child and expressed their views that it would be better to send girl

child to small jobs if they could earn instead of sending them to school. This type of perception of parents and their behavior towards their girl child imply some sorts of gender disparity. Gender disparity is very prominent within the lives of girl children among underprivileged, economically weaker section of people. The parents show importance to male child rendering effective contribution in fulfilling their needs and requirements including education neglecting girl child from these facilities. Gender disparity is the prominent cause of malnutrition among girls. The early marriage of girl before attaining 18 years (child marriage) was also observed in few families of the community. This type of child marriage culture is very detrimental causing several health problems to the married girls.

Table-5: Reasons for non attentive for children’s proper nurturing and education.

Reasons	No. of respondents (N=30)
Unable to afford	28 (93.3%)
Ignorance	24 (80.0%)
Non Familial participation	8 (26.6%)
Gender Discrimination	6 (20.0%)
Awareness of child right	28 (93.3%)
Preference for sending to work	7 (23.3%)
Impact of Covid 19 Pandemic	30 (100.0%)

Most of the respondents (93.3%) were found to have no knowledge about the rights of the children. They were totally ignorant about it. Another major problem as every respondent (100%) faced was the severe financial hardship during the lock down period of Covid-19 pandemic. This type of hardship situation creates so many problems among most of the families in the world and the parents find enormous difficulties in upbringing of their children due to the adverse effect of the long term pandemic. WHO highlights the effect of pandemic causing considerable harm to the lives of children in various ways¹¹. Many studies showed that children developed problems like anxiety, emotional, mental or behavioural disorders during the lock down period¹²⁻¹⁴.

Conclusion

Upbringing or rearing of children is a great challenge to the parents if they actually involve. In relation to this, the knowledge, attitude, opportunity, money are essential matters required in the process of upbringing of the children. It is often observed that the children of poor families fail to get social or any economic support from the society or community and this condition has adverse impact on child health and other

developmental outcomes. Health status of the children of such communities needs to be improved by making health awareness programme to the parents as well as by improving their socio-economic status through the government schemes as announced by the Government time to time for the people of below poverty line.

In human rights, the child right should get more emphasis so that every child can enjoy the facilities provided by the government for their development in all aspects as they are the future citizens of a nation. All respondents were found ignorant about the child right. Awareness is essential among these illiterate people about the rights of child - how to explore these and to take up during their childhood as government has different schemes to facilitate child development. Although there is enormous progress in every aspects, even many children are found to deprive of the basic needs and are vulnerable to different types of abuse, exploitation and slavery. For protection of children, the child rights should be respected, then only every vulnerable child will get opportunity to be free from all types of violence and to flourish enjoying his childhood fully as other children do. Every responsible citizen should commit to pay respects to all the rights of the children facilitating them to reach their highest potential.

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