

# A Comparative Study Of Father's And Mother's Involvement In The Care Of Their Children Aged 3-8 Years

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## ABSTRACT

### A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FATHER'S AND MOTHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CARE OF THEIR CHILDREN AGED 3-8 YEARS

**Background:** The study was conducted to compare the involvement of fathers' and mothers' in care of their children aged 3-8 years in terms of taking responsibilities and being engaged, among staff of a medical school from western India.

**Methods:** Cross sectional study was carried out among 180 biological parents (90 fathers and 90 mothers). They were from different cadres and were interviewed using snow ball technique.

**Results:** Mothers were more involved in attending immunization clinic (24.4 %), visiting doctor when child fell sick (28.3 %), attending school meeting (39.4%), helping in homework (38.8%), involved in daily routine activity (46.6%) and at night (38.3%), solving problems of the child (50%). While fathers

were more involved in dropping their child to school (43.3%), playing (44.4 %), taking future decisions (48.3%).

**Recommendation:** Exploring need for Father's initiative programs like group discussions, debates at the working places can be an option to better involvement.

**Key words:** Child- Care, Fathers' Involvement, Mothers' Involvement, Snow ball technique.

### TEXT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FATHER'S AND MOTHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CARE OF THEIR CHILDREN AGED 3-8 YEARS

**INTRODUCTION:** Child care is almost exclusively a woman's realm in virtually every culture, no doubt due in part to the fact that only women can do it, yet the father has important roles to play both in sharing child care responsibilities and in providing crucial support to the mother. The father can also easily take part or better yet take full or major responsibility. During early child life, mother and child bond increases at a maximum level, during childhood fathers play a pilot role by spending most of time playing with them or learning new things. Playing with children is common among men and probably gives many women an "opening" for expanding the father's involvement in child's health, behavior, daily and other extracurricular activity. Research from a U.S. Department of Education study indicates that the role of fathers in school and child care is linked with the greater achievement of children<sup>[1]</sup>

Father and mother roles continue to change, especially in today's over-scheduled, stressful environment. Studies show that about two-thirds of mothers of young children have outside employment. Currently, about 40 percent of fathers work over 50 hours per week at work. The conflict between career and family continues, and child care from dad is especially needed in a two-career family. Mothers have historically fulfilled the primary role in raising children, but since the late 20th century, the role of the father in child care has been given greater prominence and social acceptance in some western countries<sup>[2]</sup> The father's role during the 1960s continued to focus primarily on breadwinning, although more mothers were entering the labor force. The rate of labor-force participation for married mothers increased from 18.6% in 1960 to 30.0 %

in 1970. The 1970s also brought a renewed interest in parent education based on research about early child development and importance of parent involvement. This shift of mothers had not resulted in fathers assuming equal responsibility for children in early childhood programs. (Children's defense fund, 2001)<sup>[3]</sup>

Coltrane (1996) and LaRossa (1988)<sup>[4]</sup> observed that, the social changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s had a major impact on family life as mothers of young children joined the workforce in larger numbers and the rate of divorce increased dramatically. The image of the new father was the *nurturing* father. The new *nurturing* father bathes his children, changes diapers, provides solo child care, attends school and leisure activities, helps with home-work, prepares meals, shops for clothing, and plays with his children. The demarcation between mother and father roles was blurred, with wives and husbands sharing in all facets of house-work, child care and breadwinning. However, researchers have suggested that the *nurturing* father who shares child care and household responsibilities with mothers is more of a cultural image than reality<sup>[4]</sup>. As there is paucity of information on this subject from India, the current study was conducted to compare the involvement of fathers' and mothers' in the care of their children aged 3-8 years in terms of taking responsibilities and being engaged among staff of a medical school from western India.

**METHODS:** This was a cross sectional study carried out among 180 parents (90 fathers and 90 mothers) having children between three to eight years of age. They were selected from three cadres viz; doctors, clerks/nurses and peons through non probability, convenient sampling drawn from staff of a medical school of western India. 30 fathers and 30 mothers from each of these cadres were interviewed using snow ball technique in which other subject in the study were accessed by getting information from interviewees while they were being interviewed. The parents were biological fathers and mothers and not from the same family as it was thought that absolute involvement of each parent would be more helpful as compared to their combined role in child care. A pre-designed, semi-structured questionnaire was used to interview the study participants. The proforma was pilot tested and was kept similar for both father and mother. The same included demographic profile viz; age of father/mother, education, occupation, monthly income in rupees, wife's employment status with working hours, total number of children with age. The questionnaire specially focused on fathers and mothers in the care of their child in terms of taking responsibilities and being engaged with child's daily activities and extracurricular activities. Responsibility referred to the extent to which a father is responsible for child's care and welfare (health, education, behavior) and Engagement (daily routine and extracurricular activities) referred to direct, one-on-one interactions with the child. The data was entered into

computer and analyzed using Epi Info (version 6.04d) software.

Minimum two visits were required to study each subject. But for doctors' a minimum of three to four visits were required. The subjects were initially contacted by personal visit, when they were oriented towards the purpose and objectives of study and verbal consent was obtained. Place and time for interviews was decided according to mutual convenience. They were assured that privacy and confidentiality would be maintained in future and results would be communicated if needed. Subjects were actually interviewed during second visit. The time taken for an interview was 20- 30 minutes on an average.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:** A total of 180 parents (90 fathers and 90 mothers) having children between three to eight years of age were studied. Among 90 fathers, wives of 32 (35.6%) were working whereas all the spouses of 90 mothers interviewed were working. Out of the 90 fathers interviewed, 78 resided in the same city. 39% of them had children aged three to four years, 35% had them in the age group of five to six years and in the rest of them children were in the age group seven to eight years. Nearly half of the fathers and mothers had two children, 40% fathers and 35 % mothers had a single child, 2% each of them had four children and rest had three children.

Table.1 and Figure.1 shows involvement of mothers and fathers in various aspects of care of their children. The subjects studied were enquired about the birth related information of their child (birth time, weight and date) to get an idea about their awareness on the same. The criterion for awareness was defined as 'awareness for two of the three parameters' and those aware for only 'one of the three' parameters were considered unaware. Mothers (32.2%) had better awareness regarding birth related information of their child as compared to fathers (28.3%) and also awareness of fathers and mothers was better among doctors and clerks as compared to peons which can possibly be attributed to the difference in the literacy level. It is also seen that mothers attended the child for immunization in almost half of the cases. A higher percentage of both parents accompanied the child to the doctor (60 %) whenever the child was sick as compared to any of the parents going alone. When the responses were analyzed for the mothers separately, the percentage of mothers (28.3%) alone accompanying the child to the doctor is quite high than the percentage of either both the parents or father alone accompanying the child (10 %). A clerk said: "*Ame banne sathe j davakhane jai che, karan kea ane mummy ne ghare rahi ne baba ni chinta vadhare thay ane nana chokra bimar hoy to mummy ni jarur to vadhare pade ne , atle hu to ane darek vakte sathe lai jau*" (We visit doctor together as the mother would sit at home and keep worrying). These findings are corroborated with the findings of Hossain and Roopnaire (1993), who also found that lower

relative rate of fathers than mothers were involved in the child care and is consistent across socioeconomic level<sup>[5]</sup>

Higher percentage of mothers (39.4%) in all the three classes attended school meetings alone as compared to fathers (12.2%). This finding has also been corroborated by other studies, that mothers spend more time in children's academic interaction at home as well as school<sup>[5,6]</sup> A total of 19 subjects were not attending the school meetings at all and among these responses, majority of them were from fathers (14 %) as compared to mothers (8.3%). A male doctor said: "*meeting no time and hospital no time adjust thato j nathi atle kadach varsh ma akad vakat attend thay che pan ani mummy regular attend kari leche atle mare jarur padti nathi*" (As my hospital time and meeting at school time does not match, so the mother most of the time attends school meetings and my presence is not required). Another doctor said: "Ame banne job karie che atle jyare jene time made ae jai ave" (whoever finds time attends meeting). A nurse said: "*Hu regular meeting attend kari lavu chu pan mara husband kyarek j kare che*" (I attend regular meetings but my husband does it sometimes). Mothers were more involved (38.8%) as compared to fathers (18.8%) in the homework of their child. This finding is also supported by a study of Jaipaul et al, that mothers spend more time in children's academic interaction at home than fathers<sup>[7]</sup> and also in a study by Michael C.A., that mothers invest significantly more time in children's academic activities than fathers<sup>[8]</sup> It is shown that a higher percentage of doctor and nurse mothers helped children in school homework, when compared to peon fathers. This finding is supported by the study of Hossain and Shipman, that parents' involvement is positively influenced by their education level<sup>[6]</sup> A male doctor said: "*I really want; I can't do so many times. I feel guilty for the, same but I am helpless because if I don't prioritize my job how can I make my children's future bright and as a doctor I have responsibility towards patients too*"

It is shown that higher percentage of fathers (43.3%) was involved as compared to mothers (26.6%) in dropping their child to school when vehicle was not available. The difference between fathers' and mothers' responses in dropping their child was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and higher so in doctors. It is also shown that there was almost negligible (3.3%) involvement of fathers in child's routine activities like bathing, feeding, and dressing as compared to mothers (46.6%). A male peon said: "*Roj to navdava dhovanu kam to na fave pan jyare raja hoy to maro chokro mari jode j nah che, ha pan khavdavanu to ane mummy jode j khay che*" (Daily it is not possible to bathe the child, on holidays I do bathe the child, but feeding is done by mother only). A female doctor said: "*My husband is orthopedic surgeon, so even if he tries, it is not possible for him to give time to his child, but he is always emotionally*

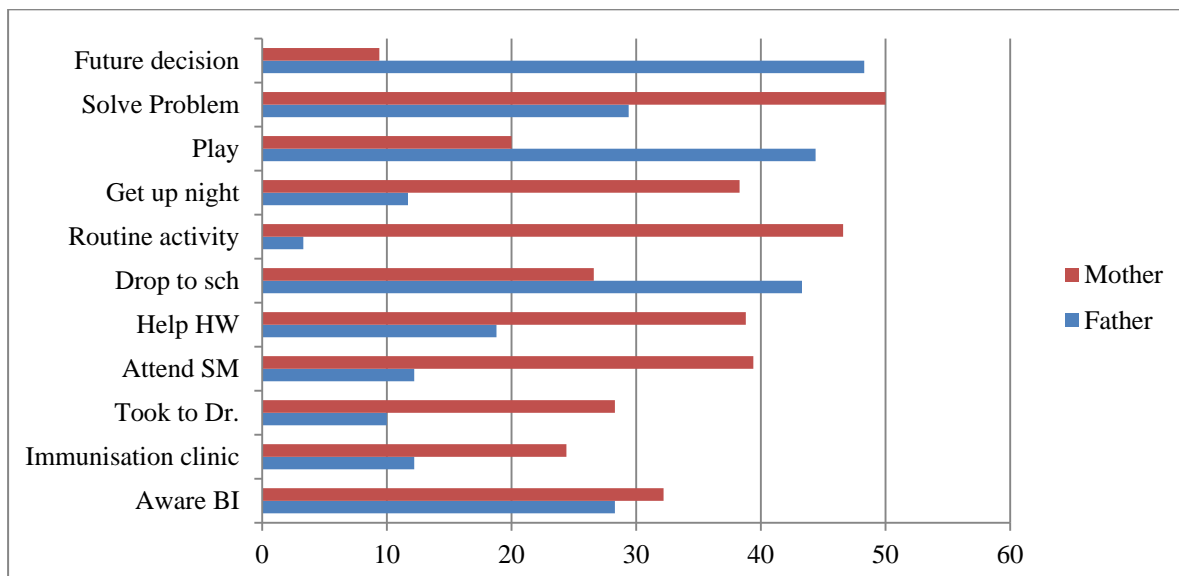
*with us, I can't expect much more*". This finding has been supported by a study of Michael C.A,<sup>[8]</sup> and Hossain and Shipman that mothers are more involved in children's care as compared to fathers and this is positively influenced by their education<sup>[6]</sup> and the findings are also supported by Parke and Sawin that mothers spend more time in routine care of their children as compared to fathers<sup>[9]</sup>

Mothers get up at night often (38.3%) as compared to fathers (11.6%), whenever child needs them at night even if both mothers and fathers are working. This finding is consistent with studies from Hossain and Ziarat<sup>[6]</sup> and also with Parke and Sawin that mothers are more involved in child's routine activity than fathers.<sup>[9]</sup> A male doctor said: "*Pehla hu uthu chu pachi ani mummy ne uthadene sui jau chu pachi ane mummy bathu kam patave*" (first I get up, then wake the mother up, thereafter I sleep again and the mother finishes all the work). A clerk said: "*Ratre to ane mummy j uthe, Marathi to uthatu j nathi*" (At night mother only wakes up as I can't). A female peon said: "*Chokra nu kam hoy to apde j uthvu pade ana bapa to kyare uthata j nathi*" (For child's work I only get up, the father never gets up). It is shown that fathers are more involved in playing with their children (44.4 %) as compared to mothers (20 %), and this finding is supported by study conducted by Parke and Sawin, that in relative frequency father devote more time through play than mothers<sup>[9]</sup> but is not supported by study conducted by Jaipaul et al<sup>[7]</sup> who have stated that fathers and mothers are both actively involved in child playing. A male clerk said: "*maro chokro to mari rah joine j betho hoy che ghare jaine pehla mare ane jode ramvu j pade che*" (My child waits for me to come home and play with him, so when I reach home the first thing I do is to play with him). Responses from mothers too showed similar findings, that fathers get more involved in playing activities with their children as compared to mothers. A female nurse said: "*Ghar na bija kam mathi ucha aviae to ramiae ,aamm to ana papa ane jode kaik ne kaik ramya karta hoy che*" (for me it's difficult to take out time from household work to play with the child so the father is involved in playing with the child).

Nearly all mothers were friendly in solving problems of their children (50%) as compared to fathers (29.4%) and this can be due to the fact that mothers by nature are always polite with their children. It is also shown that fathers are more involved in taking decision (48.3%) as compared to mothers (9.4%), this can be due to the male dominant behavior prevalent in the society. A male doctor also said: "*aama to routine decision ane mummy lai leti hoy che parantu mota decision ame sathe made ne j leta hoy che*" (most of the decisions are taken by mother, but when it comes to taking big decisions we take them together). A female nurse said: "*kai niryan levo hoy to ana pappu j leta hoy che*" (If a decision has to be taken, it is taken by the father only).

**Table1 ; Father's and Mother's involvement in the care of their Children among the three classes studied**

	Doctors (N=60, 30 Mothers and 30 Fathers)		Clerks(N=60, 30 Mothers and 30 Fathers)		Peons(N=60, 30 Mothers and 30 Fathers)		Total(N=180, 90 Mothers and 90 Fathers)	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
<b>Awareness regarding birth status</b>	23 (38.33%)	25 (41.66%)	18 (30.0%)	21 (35%)	10 (16.6%)	12 (20.0%)	51 (28.3%)	58 (32.2%)
<b>Attending immunization clinic</b>	3 (5%)	13 (21.6%)	5 (8.3%)	15 (25%)	14 (23.3%)	16 (26.6%)	22 (12.2%)	44 (24.45%)
<b>Taking to doctors</b>	5 (8.3%)	17 (28.3%)	4 (6.6%)	16 (26.6%)	9 (15%)	18 (30%)	18 (10.0%)	51 (28.3%)
<b>Attending child's school meeting</b>	5 (8.3%)	26 (43.3%)	9 (15%)	23 (38.3%)	08 (13.3%)	22 (36.6%)	22 (12.2%)	71 (39.4%)
<b>Helping in Home Work</b>	8 (13.3%)	29 (48.3%)	13 (21.6%)	27 (45%)	13 (21.6%)	14 (23.3%)	34 (18.8%)	70 (38.8%)
<b>Dropping to school</b>	28 (46.6%)	8 (13.3%)	28 (46.6%)	20 (33.3%)	22 (36.6%)	20 (33.3%)	78 (43.3%)	48 (26.6%)
<b>Routine activity</b>	0 0.0%	30 (50%)	4 (6.6%)	24 (40.0%)	2 (3.3%)	30 (50%)	06 (3.3%)	84 (46.6%)
<b>Getting up at night</b>	5 (8.3%)	17 (28.3%)	8 (13.3%)	22 (36.6%)	8 (13.3%)	30 (50.0%)	21 (11.7%)	69 (38.3%)
<b>Playing with child</b>	30 (50%)	12 (20.0%)	24 (40.0%)	15 (25.0%)	26 (43.3%)	09 (15.0%)	80 (44.4%)	36 (20.0%)
<b>Problem solving freely</b>	16 (26.6%)	30 (50%)	19 (31.6%)	30 (50%)	18 (30.0%)	30 (50%)	53 (29.4%)	90 (50%)
<b>Taking decision</b>	27 (45%)	6 (10%)	30 (50.0%)	3 (5.0%)	30 (50%)	8 (13.3%)	87 (48.3%)	17 (9.4%)

**Figure 1; Father's and Mother's involvement in the care of their Children (%)**

Short forms:BI- Birth related information, SM-School Meeting, HW-Home Work, sch- School



**Table 2; Involvement of Fathers in Child Care according to their Wife`s Employment (N =90)**

	Wife employed (N =32) N (%)	Wife Not employed N=58 N (%)
<b>Attending Immunization Clinic</b>		
Mother only	05(15.6)	10(17.2)
Father only	02 (6.3)	07 (12.1)
Both	15 (46.9)	24 (41.1)
Sometime Mother/Father	10 (31.3)	17 (29.3)
<b>Attending School Meetings</b>		
Mother only	13(40.6)	22 (40.7)
Father only	03(9.4)	07(13.0)
Both	05(15.6)	10(18.5)
Sometime Mother/Father	06(18.8)	08(14.8)
Not attended	05(15.6)	07(13.0)
Chi-square= 0.6122, df 4, probability 0.9617		
<b>Helping in Home Work</b>		
Mother only	15(46.9)	19(35.2)
Father only	7(21.9)	11(20.4)
Sometime Mother/Father	08(25.0)	19(35.2)
Both	02(6.3)	05(9.3)
Chi-square= 1.6037, df 3, probability 0.6585		
<b>Taking Future Decision for the Child</b>		
Mother only	01(3.1)	06(10.3)
Father only	11(34.4)	33(56.9)
Both	17(53.1)	15(25.9)
Sometime Mother/Father	03(9.4)	04(6.9)
Chi-square =7.9954, df 3, probability 0.0461		
<b>Attending to Doctor whenever Child was sick</b>		
Mother	07(21.9%)	04(6.9%)
Father	04(12.5%)	05(8.6%)
Both	18(56.3%)	36(62.1%)
Sometime Mother/Father	3(9.4%)	13(22.4%)
Chi-square= 6.18, df 3, probability 0.10		

There was no statistically significant difference found in father's involvement in child care when their wife was or was not employed outside. This finding is consistent with study by Pleck that there was no significant difference found in fathers' involvement in childcare when mothers do or do not work outside<sup>[10]</sup> and also supported by Parke and Sawin<sup>[9]</sup> that difference between father and mother are narrower with regards to engagement when mother is employed. This shows that mother continue to shoulder the lion's share of work at home as well. And also this shows the unwillingness on the part of father to become involved in home even if demands are high.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Father and mother roles continue to change, especially in today's over-scheduled, stressful environment. Still major part of child care is shouldered by mother. While fathers have predominant role in playing with their child, dropping of their child whenever vehicle for school was not available and making important decisions regarding child care. Mothers played pivotal role as a single handed person across socioeconomic status especially in child routine activity and getting up at night whenever child cried or needed support.

Mothers play important role in child school meeting and helping them in school homework as compared to fathers. Mothers were/are almost exclusively involved in daily routine activity of child like bathing, dressing, feeding and health care like immunizations and visit to doctor as compared to fathers. Still majority of child share their problems freely with their mothers as compared to fathers irrespective of gender of child. Working mothers continue to shoulder the lion's share of work at home as well. And also this shows the unwillingness on the part of father to become involved in home even if demands are high. Child care activities should be equally shared by both parents irrespective of socioeconomic status and mothers' employment. By increasing father's involvement in child's routine activity and school activity side by side with mother especially in low cadres, child care can be better catered to. Increased maternal role in extracurricular activity and playing with their child may equalize responsibilities between parents.

*Recommendations;* Exploring the need for Father's initiative programs like group discussions, debates at the working places can be an option to better involvement. Government policies like flexibility in working hours, paternal leave not only during child

birth but also for child's education and sickness can be an option to strengthen paternal involvement. *Future direction:* A longitudinal study with larger sample size, including participants from other working places could give a better and more informative idea regarding role of fathers and mothers in various child activity, behavior and outcome. As this study was conducted in a limited area of one institute, it is difficult to extrapolate the results to general population. To add, a cross sectional cannot judge that fathers and mothers involvement and caring improves child wellbeing.

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