

Factors affecting involvement of gender in childcare activities of agricultural labourers

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Parental role and their involvement in childcare are very important for the overall development of the child. Here attempt has been made to quantify the percentage of involvement of both mother and father in childcare separately. Further to find out the correlation of parental involvement with different independent variables a study was conducted on 160 agricultural labourer households having at least one child in the age group of 1-5 years from 8 villages randomly selected from four blocks, which were purposively selected from four districts of Orissa. The percentage of share of fathers, mothers and other relatives in childcare was 19.92, 52.84 and 27.24, respectively indicating that mothers took care of their children more than two times than that of fathers and even members other than parents has more involvement than the fathers. The parental involvement was found to be positively correlated with their attitude, knowledge, skill and education whereas negatively correlated with number of children, family type and family size. Except family size, all the independent variables under the study were significantly correlated with parental involvement in case of both men and women. Regression analysis showed that the independent variables like attitude, skill, number of children and family type contributed significantly for the involvement of the women agricultural labourers in childcare.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Parental involvement, Childcare, Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Education, Family size, Number of children

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From times immemorial, child rearing responsibilities have been borne by the mother. The mother is supposed to have a maternal instinct that is aroused automatically as soon as she conceives and becomes aware of it. Mothers typically fulfill the role of primary caregiver, and thus meet the child's needs for basic security. The bond between mother and child is established in the earliest stages of child's life (Poffenberger, 1981). The role of father is also important for the development of the child. But the present society with the prevailing cultural norms has overlooked the above important statement. A popular cultural image in families predicts low father's involvement in children than mothers (Acock and Demo, 1994; Biller, 1993). People take it casually and there is wide variation in their behaviour. The kind of awareness generating in the society on gender issues may warrant fathers

to share the nourishment and nutrition of the child. In this context a study is very essential to quantify the percentage of involvement of both mother and father in childcare separately and the factors affecting their involvement.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Two districts each of coastal and inland region of Odisha were randomly selected for the study. One block of each district was selected purposively based on the highest percentage of agricultural labourers. From each block, two villages were randomly selected. By adopting proportionate random sampling technique agricultural labourer households were selected from each village. So, the total numbers of sample households from 8 villages were 160. Care was taken to ensure that the labourer household should have women agricultural

labourer. In each household the major income must come from agricultural labour and wages.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

Household background :

The parameters under household background included under study were caste, family type and size, number of children, age and education of parents are presented in Table 1. The percentage of scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward caste families were 46.87, 40.63 and 12.50, respectively. None of the respondents were from higher castes. The data collected on type of family indicated that 60.0 per cent were nuclear and 40.0 per cent were joint families.

Majority (66.87 %) families had six or more members, only 5.0 per cent families were very small families with three members. The remaining families (28.13 %) had members of 4-

5. Only very limited percentage of labourers had followed very small family norms. Among the respondents 23.12 per cent families had only one child. The families with 2-3 and 4-5 children were 38.75 and 30.0 per cent, respectively. Few families (8.13 %) had six or more children.

Individual profile of men and women labourers :

The data on age and education of the men and women labourers were recorded and presented in Table 2. All the labourers were categorized into three age categories like less than 25, 25-40 and more than 40 years. The percentage of MALs (Men Agricultural Labourers) in the age group of less than 25, 25-40 and more than 40 were 8.75, 81.25 and 10.0, respectively. It was observed that more than four fifth (81.25 %) of men respondents were in the age group of 25-40 years. With regards to the women labourers like men majority 54.38 per cent were in the age group of 25 to 40 years and the rest 45.62 per cent belonged to the age group of less than 25 years.

Data on education revealed that percentage of illiterate MALs and WALs (Women Agricultural Labourers) were 40.62

Sr. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Caste		
	SC	75	46.87
	ST	65	40.63
	OBC	20	12.50
	Others	-	-
2.	Type of family		
	Nuclear	96	60.0
	Joint	64	40.0
3.	Family size, members		
	Up to 3	8	5.0
	4 to 5	45	28.13
	6 and more	107	66.87
4.	No. of children		
	1	37	23.12
	2 to 3	62	38.75
	4 to 5	48	30.0
	6 and above	13	8.13

Sr. No.	Profiles	MALs		WALs	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age, years				
	Less than 25	14	8.75	73	45.62
	25-40	130	81.25	87	54.38
	More than 40	16	10.0	-	-
2.	Education				
	Illiterate	65	40.62	128	80.0
	Primary	67	41.88	30	18.75
	Middle School	10	6.25	2	1.25
	High School and above	18	11.25	-	-

and 80.0, respectively. Out of 59.38 per cent literate MALs, majority (41.88 %) had educational level up to primary where as 6.25 and 11.25 per cent were up to middle school and high school and above, respectively. Out of 20.0 per cent literate WALs, only 1.25 per cent had education up to middle school. None of the women labourers had educational level up to high school and above. The result indicated that women illiteracy was twice than that of men. This was in congruence with the study conducted by Hann and Dubey (2005) that the deprived groups have much lower literacy than other groups.

Parental involvement in childcare :

Parental role and their involvement in childcare are very important for the overall development of the child. Parental involvement was quantified separately for both mother and father and their percentage of involvement in childcare are computed and presented in Table 3. Involvement of parents in childcare was measured by a rating scale which was developed for the study and it had the capacity to quantify the involvement of wife, husband and other members. An individual with full involvement in all the aspects could get highest obtainable score of 72. The mean and standard deviation of scores obtained by MALs was found to be 14.34 and 7.55, respectively. In case of WALs, the mean score was 38.05 and the standard deviation was 7.38. The percentage of share of MALs, WALs and other relatives was found to be 19.92, 52.84 and 27.24, respectively. It was further observed that involvement of father was less in compared to mothers and others. In other words WALs took care of their children more than two times than that of MALs and even members other than parents have more involvement than the fathers. A popular cultural image in families predicts low father's involvement in children than mothers (Acock and Demo, 1994; Biller, 1993).

Correlation analysis :

From the previous results it was found that the men and women agricultural labourers had different levels of parental involvement in childcare. Moreover, the parental involvement was believed to be influenced by many factors. Therefore, correlation analysis was conducted to find out the degree of relationship that exists between the dependent and independent variables considered in this study. The independent variables like attitude, knowledge, skill, education, number of children, family type and family size were taken for correlation analysis.

Correlation analysis of women agricultural labourers :

The correlation matrix of parental involvement of women agricultural labourers was found out and is presented in Table 4. The parental involvement was found to be positively correlated with their attitude, knowledge, skill and education whereas negatively correlated with number of children, family type and family size. The involvement of WALs had significant correlation with all the variables except family size. The reason may be that size of a family, large or small, does not change the involvement of mothers in childcare practices. Hence, it was subsequently dropped from further analysis.

Correlation analysis of men agricultural labourers :

The correlation matrix of men agricultural labourers on parental involvement is presented in Table 5. The dependent variable (parental involvement) had a positive correlation with their attitude, knowledge, skill and education and was found to be negatively correlated with number of children, family type and family size. All the independent variables under the study were significantly correlated with parental involvement except with family size. The reasons may be similar to that of WALs cited above. Accordingly family size was dropped from

Table 3: Parental involvement in childcare

Sr. No.	Statistics	MALs	WALs
1.	Mean	14.34	38.05
2.	Standard deviation	7.55	7.38
3.	Percentage of involvement	19.92	52.84

Table 4 : Correlation matrix of parental involvement of WALs

	Parental involvement	Attitude	Knowledge	Skill	Education	No. of children	Family type
Attitude	0.442**						
Knowledge	0.166*	0.115					
Skill	0.505**	0.39**	0.222**				
Education	0.322**	0.574**	0.123	0.352**			
No. of children	-0.306**	-0.354**	-0.111	-0.056	-0.23**		
Family type	-0.321**	-0.063	0.011	-0.417**	-0.346**	-0.11	
Family size	-0.12	-0.189*	-0.07	0.043	-0.268**	0.239**	0.296**

* and ** indicate that significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

regression analysis.

Regression analysis :

Further, regression analysis was conducted to predict the parental involvement from the independent variables such as attitude, knowledge, skill, education, number of children and family type separately for WALs and MALs. The prediction equation, found out from the regression analysis for the women agricultural labourers was given below :

$$Y=6.965 + 9.743^{**} X_1 + 0.105 X_2 + 0.426^{**} X_3 - 1.275 X_4 - 2.097^{**} X_5 - 3.458^{**} X_6 \text{ and } R^2 = 0.40$$

where, Y = Parental involvement

X₁ = Attitude,

X₂ = Knowledge,

X₃ = Skill,

X₄ = Education,

X₅ = Number of children

X₆ = Family type

From the above equation it was observed that knowledge (X₂) and education (X₄) were not contributing significantly for the prediction of parental involvement in case of women. Therefore, these two parameters were dropped from the regression analysis and the prediction equation was refitted as given below :

$$Y=11.237 + 8.246^{**} X_1 + 0.444^{**} X_3 - 2.085^{**} X_5 - 3.0^{**} X_6 \text{ and } R^2 = 0.379^{**}$$

From the above prediction equation it was found out that the R² value decreased from 0.40 to 0.379 *i.e.* only 2.1 per cent which is considered not to be a significant reduction. So, it was concluded that the parental involvement of the women agricultural labourers could be well predicted by the latter regression equation.

Similarly, the following prediction equation for parental involvement of men agricultural labourers was also found out from the regression analysis.

$$Y=4.853 + 7.309^{**} X_1 + 0.603^{**} X_2 + 0.01 X_3 - 1.303 X_4 - 2.828^{**} X_5 - 0.928 X_6 \text{ and } R^2 = 0.292^{**}$$

From the above equation it was observed that skill (X₃), education(X₄) and family type (X₆) were found to be not contributing significantly for the prediction of parental

involvement of MALs. Therefore, these three parameters were dropped from the regression analysis and the prediction equation was refitted as given below :

$$Y=-4.086+5.49^{**} X_1+0.687^{**} X_2-2.584^{**} X_5 \text{ and } R^2=0.278^{**}$$

From the above prediction equation it was found out that the R² value decreased from 0.292 to 0.278 indicating a reduction of 1.4 per cent, which is not significant. So, it was concluded that the parental involvement of men agricultural labourers could be well predicted by the latter regression equation.

Attitude :

The above findings point out that development of favourable attitudes among parents would lead to better involvement in childcare. This being an important common psychological factor for men and women, utmost care should be taken for building of positive attitudes towards child. Although there is a natural feeling and instinct amongst the parents for the wellbeing of child but there are variations in attitude towards different childcare practices. If favourable attitude of the parents towards childcare practices would be ensured then their involvement would increase automatically. In order to bring changes in the attitude of the parents, change agents from the department of women and child welfare, health and family welfare department must contact them and eliminate the false notions with respect to different recommended childcare practices.

Number of children :

It is another important factor affecting the involvement of parents in childcare practices. It was found to be a significant factor for both men and women agricultural labourers. The result of regression analysis lead to a conclusion that more is the number of children in the family less is the parental involvement for the youngest child. The finding seems to be very logical because when the number of children increases the youngest one gets less time and ultimately the scores in parental care comes down. This has been reflected in the regression analysis. In other words small family norm is ideal to promote parental involvement in childcare. Although

Table 5: Correlation matrix of parental involvement of MALs

	Parental involvement	Attitude	Knowledge	Skill	Education	No. of children	Family type
Attitude	0.37**						
Knowledge	0.326**	0.191*					
Skill	0.21**	0.261**	0.164*				
Education	0.198*	0.604**	0.001	0.1			
No. of children	-0.356**	-0.195*	-0.103	-0.307**	-0.401**		
Family type	-0.198*	-0.149	-0.15	0.05	-0.378**	0.369**	
Family size	-0.14	0.101	-0.08	0.075	-0.267**	0.452**	0.296**

* and ** indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

government is propagating this idea but something more is needed to convince the parents. The tendency among the wage earners to have more children should be checked through appropriate educational programme highlighting the multiple benefits of small family norm.

Skill in childcare activities :

This factor was found significantly associated with the involvement of WALs in childcare. How to perform a particular recommended childcare constitute the skill. Acquiring the know-how, the mother's motivation to adopt different recommended childcare practices would have gone up. So, it can be implied that WALs should be exposed to training programmes to learn skills on recommended childcare practices. Up-gradation of the skills of the women should be taken up on priority basis through demonstrations and trainings.

Family type :

This variable was found to be significantly negatively correlated with the involvement of women in child. The regression analysis also found out significant contribution of the variable to the variation of the dependent variable that is involvement of mother in childcare. It can be interpreted that mothers in the nuclear family involve significantly more in childcare practices than mothers in joint family.

Knowledge :

Knowledge was found to be a significant factor associated with involvement of father in the childcare. More is the knowledge of the father in childcare better would be his involvement. It is ordinarily seen in rural areas that fathers do not feel responsible for childcare, although many activities demand the support of fathers. It is very common to see that knowledgeable person behave and act in a different way than that of ignorant people. Even with masculine qualities of father, knowledge in childcare can prompt the father to have re-look at his involvement. Knowledge in childcare may motivate the fathers to adopt recommended childcare practices. Knowledge also helps the father to make appropriate decisions and undertake activities when child suffers from diseases, malnutrition and nutritional related diseases.

It was further found that education is not contributing significantly for involvement of parents. The explanation for the above finding may be, both men and women agricultural labourers have poor educational background. Secondly, whatever little they have achieved in their educational attainment, they are not exposed to any knowledge on childcare practices. Moreover due to poor education they do not have broad outlook on childcare and knowledge on government programmes. McGowan and Johnson (1984)

revealed that highly educated mothers were socially active and have exposure to mass media and literature and they have much knowledge about the significance of providing better care and meaningful interaction to their children and were trying to build good future of child by involving themselves in care of child. Fathers generally keep them away from childcare activities having a perception that these are jobs of the women folk. Almost all the fathers have low skill scores.

Conclusion :

The percentage of share of MALs, WALs and other relatives in childcare was found to be 19.92, 52.84 and 27.24, respectively. It was further observed that involvement of father was less in compared to mothers and others. In other words WALs took care of their children more than two times than that of MALs and even members other than parents have more involvement than the fathers.

The parental involvement was found to be positively correlated with their attitude, knowledge, skill and education whereas negatively correlated with number of children, family type and family size. All the independent variables under the study were significantly correlated with parental involvement except with family size in case of both men and women.

Regression analysis showed that the independent variables like attitude, skill, number of children and family type contributed significantly for the involvement of the women agricultural labourers in childcare. Similarly, in case of men the parameters like attitude, knowledge and number of children contributed significantly for their involvement.

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