

# Parental involvement in sharing childcare activities among agricultural labourer households

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■ **ABSTRACT :** In the Indian family setting, the sharing of childcare responsibilities between husband and wife is not widely accepted. Parental role and their involvement in childcare are very important for the overall development of the child. For the first time, an attempt has been made to quantify the percentage of involvement of both mother and father in childcare activities separately. 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. Majority (78.05 %) of mothers were found to be involved in cleaning baby's mouth whereas least (3.65 %) in getting play materials for the child. As high as 44.27 per cent fathers were involved in giving moral teaching to the child and a minimum (1.04 %) in introducing pre lacteal feed. 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.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Parental involvement, Childcare activities, Agricultural labourers

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Children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. They can become successful citizens only if they are carefully and properly nurtured from the very beginning. This responsibility is primarily of their parents. Parental involvement in childcare practices, good or bad can either make or mar these blooming buds. Parents should be conscious and capable of this fact. In many cases it happens so. The rich and educated people of the society have means and mind and proper training for this. But the poor and the helpless families of women agricultural labourers are far behind. These women in our country share abundant responsibilities and perform a wide spectrum of duties. In the Indian family setting, the sharing of childcare responsibilities between husband and wife is not widely accepted. Parental role and their involvement in childcare are very important for the overall development of the child. For the first time, an attempt has been made to quantify the percentage of involvement of both mother and father in childcare separately.

## ■ 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.

## Parental involvement :

Parental involvement in this study is operationalised as the degree of involvement of father and mother in different childcare activities in an ordinal scale. In a family the

involvement of both may vary.

For understanding the parental involvement in childcare a list of activities consisting of different childcare practices were prepared excluding those which were exclusively women specific. Suitable scores were assigned to father and mother depending upon their extent of involvement in these activities. Any childcare activity when done solely by father/ mother, a score of 3 is assigned to one who had been doing it. When father and mother were equally involved in that work, both of them were allotted with 1.5 score. Father was given 2 as against 1 to mother when his involvement was more than mother. The same pattern of scoring was also followed for the mother when her involvement was more than father. Accordingly for each household father's and mother's total scores were found out. When both were not involved in any childcare work, it was found to be done by someone else in the family like the in-laws or elder sibling of the child. Hence, a maximum score of 72 and a minimum of 0 can be obtained in case of full or no involvement, respectively.

The percentage of involvement was found out using the formula :

$$\text{Percentage of involvement} = \frac{\text{Score obtained by the individual}}{\text{Maximum score at full involvement}} \times 100$$

The involvement of others, than parents could be obtained by subtracting the percentage value of both the parents' together from 100.

Further, the percentage of involvement of MALs and WALs in each activity was also found out by using the formula:

$$\text{Percentage of involvement in each activity} = \frac{\text{Score obtained by all the respondents in that activity}}{\text{Maximum scores of all the respondents at full involvement}} \times 100$$

## ■ 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, which 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

**Table 1: Household background of the respondents (n=160)**

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

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 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.

### Childcare activities and parental involvement :

Different childcare activities were undertaken by parents.

Some of the most essential activities of parents and the percentage of their involvement are presented in Table 3. It was observed that majority mothers were found to be involved

in cleaning baby's mouth (78.05 %), cleaning baby's clothes and taking care of the child when sick each (77.08 %), giving bath to the child (71.88 %) followed by taking the child to PHC

Sr. No.	Profiles	MALs		WALs	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	<b>Age, years</b>				
	Less than 25	14	8.75	73	45.62
	25-40	130	81.25	87	54.38
	More than 40	16	10.0	-	-
2.	<b>Education</b>				
	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	-	-

Sr. No.	Practices	Percentage of involvement	
		Father	Mother
1.	Introduction of pre lacteal feed	1.04	30.2
2.	Feeding artificial feed	3.64	8.85
3.	Preparing weaning feed	3.13	65.63
4.	Feeding weaning feed	6.25	62.5
5.	Preparation of boiled water for the child	2.6	6.77
6.	Cleaning baby's mouth	2.6	78.05
7.	Taking the baby for passing stool	15.63	56.25
8.	Cleaning the baby after he passes stool	10.42	58.33
9.	Baby keeping	15.10	34.9
10.	Cutting baby's nail	28.65	65.10
11.	Massaging the child's body with oil	16.67	64.58
12.	Giving bath to the child	15.63	71.88
13.	Dressing the child	15.63	68.75
14.	Changing bed cloth when wet or soiled	13.02	68.23
15.	Cleaning baby's clothes	7.29	77.08
16.	Taking the child to PHC for immunization	21.35	69.27
17.	Taking the child to doctor for treatment	41.67	45.83
18.	Taking care of the child when sick	13.54	77.08
19.	Taking the child to school/ Anganwadi	25.52	18.23
20.	Playing with the child	25.0	21.88
21.	Getting play materials for the child	40.10	3.65
22.	Interacting with child	34.89	24.5
23.	Giving moral teaching	44.27	49.48
24.	Rectifying children's mistakes	39.58	60.42

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

for immunization (69.27 %). Whereas majority of the fathers were found to be involved in giving moral teaching to the child (44.27 %) followed by taking the child to doctor for treatment (41.67 %), getting play material for the child (40.10 %) and rectifying children's mistakes (39.58 %). In activity like getting play materials for the child, least percentage (3.65) of mothers was found to be involved. It was good to notice that only 1.04 per cent fathers were found to be involved in introducing pre lacteal feed which is considered as a wrong practice. The percentage of father and mother involved in preparing boiled water was also quite less *i.e.* 2.6 per cent and 6.77 per cent, respectively. In reality this was not found to be commonly practiced in village area especially in labourer families due to shortage of fuel wood and their ignorance on the importance of giving boiled water to the baby. Mothers were found to excel fathers in their involvement in childcare practices in almost all the activities except the activities like taking the child to school/anganwadi, playing with the child and interacting with the child.

Similarly it was reported by Singh and Punia (2000) that regarding the feeding, weaning, toileting- bathing- dressing up, health care etc. mothers had high to moderate involvement because the major duty or responsibility of looking after the personal-care of infants rests on the shoulders of women. A popular cultural image in families predicts low father's involvement in children than mothers (Acock and Demo, 1994; Biller, 1993).

#### 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 4. 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.

#### Conclusion :

Majority mothers were found to be involved in cleaning baby's mouth (78.05 %), cleaning baby's clothes and taking care of the child when sick each (77.08 %), giving bath to the child (71.88 %) followed by taking the child to PHC for immunization (69.27 %). As high as 44.27 per cent fathers were found to be involved in giving moral teaching to the child followed by taking the child to doctor for treatment (41.67 %), getting play material for the child (40.10 %) and rectifying children's mistakes (39.58 %). In activity like getting play materials for the child, least percentage (3.65) of mothers was found to be involved. Least percentage (1.04) of fathers were found to be involved in introducing pre lacteal feed

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.

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