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Impact of Parental Lifestyle on Early Childhood in Modern Indian Social Setting: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Researchers confirm that 80% of brain development is completed by the age of 8 . During these early childhood years, parents become the primary role models. Both parental lifestyle and parenting style have a major impact on the growth and development of children. However, India still lacks a diversified simulation environment, trained teachers, and parent participation scope for the early childhood years. Although parental awareness has increased a lot about individualist child-centric needs, parents are still in darkness about the effect of parental lifestyle. Under-investment in this topic can provide a younger generation of obese, codependent, anxious, and overly obedient people. Generation Alpha has a huge scope for socioeconomic contribution and Millennial/generation Z parents should not miss that chance.

Keywords - parenting, lifestyle, ECE, ECDP, ECCE**Sudipta Nandi**

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Introduction

There are many hard-to-reach regions in India. Awareness of parental lifestyle is a far-away dream there. Even vaccines have to take an alternative route to those places. However, people like AVD system worker Haque are the saviors. Haque travels 35 km to reach the remote public health centers of Assam for vaccine delivery. Since 2013, he has served a rural population of 1 million¹. This kind of community worker can be a major facilitator of a community-parent-teacher support network in areas with non-internet users. Rural and urban Indian parents still lack awareness of the effect of parental lifestyle on early childhood. Although modern Indians accept child individuality with flexibility, government and state-led approaches are not adequate. This paper explores the major challenges related to that awareness gap.

Objectives

According to UNICEF, 0-8 years of a child's lifespan refers to early childhood. These initial postpartum years demonstrate rapid comprehensive growth and development of mental and physical structures, emotions, learning capacity, and brain. Additionally, these years establish the foundation of all types of learning for the course of life. An appropriate learning foundation reflects reduced school dropout, repetition count, and better educational attainment². In India, considering the BPL population (approximately 54.88%; rural+urban), more than 40% of the 5-year-olds face challenges for full development potential³. Contextually, parents' (primary caregivers) lifestyle factors like substance abuse, stress, obesity, low salary, nuclear family model, and poor "child rearing" education are major facilitators of such challenges.

UNICEF's ECD programs divide early childhood into three key phases.

1. "Conception to birth"
2. "Birth to 3 years"
3. "Pre-school and Pre-primary years"

Considering these three phases as standard, this paper explores how modern Indian social settings and related changes in parental lifestyle effect early childhood years. A brief comparison of pre and post-2000s social settings is also done to understand the evolution of modern social settings.

Research Questions

This paper tries to answer the following questions.

1. What are the major challenges for Early Childhood Development Potential (ECDP) in India?

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/stories/investments-health-and-hope>-Date: 15/07/2024, Time:8:00 AM

² <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/early-childhood-development#>-Date:13/07/2024, Time:10:09 AM

³ <https://cbhidghs.mohfw.gov.in/index4.php?lang=1&level=0&linkid=845&lid=856>-Date:13/07/2024, Time:10:11 AM

2. How those challenges are influenced by parental lifestyle?
3. Are those challenges the same in pre and post-2000s social settings?
4. How differently do pre and post-2000 eras deal with the ECDP challenges?

Findings

Q1.

- a) Children are unique in terms of capacity, interest, development, and learning styles. Obviously, a “one size fits all” approach cannot deal with this degree of diversity. However, there are no integrated early education policies for such an individualistic child-centric teaching approach⁴. Apart from classroom settings, most Indian homes (aka parents) do not have specific action plans for child development. The most common example should be the unhealthy comparison between siblings (induced and encouraged by parents). Phrases like “Be like your big brother/sister”, and “Why cannot you perform like your brother/sister?” often restrict the development potential with suppressive demands. Families with domestic abuse/violence trends also neglect children’s needs and behavioral problems start from that point. ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) programs lack transparency in terms of admission procedure and age⁵. The overtly competitive formal tests are not the right way to judge diverse learning capacities⁶. Even in metro cities, ECCE centers do not have appropriate play materials (sometimes unsafe). ECCE teachers should have NTT or B.Ed degrees. But, there are unregulated institutions with such degrees and they often neglect in-service training⁷.
- b) Another challenge is poor access to resources (inadequate). Government advocacy and community-based financing may change this scenario but there is no consistency for such fundraising. ECCE centers should have play and activity-based learning models⁸. However, this model is only visible in private schools. Also, most schools’ medium of instruction is English. But, the mother tongue always has a better scope to make children active recipients. Struggling curriculum, non-inclusive learning environment, fragmented supervision, and poorly coordinated administrative roles intensify the resource access issue.
- c) Finally, parental and cultural involvement in the learning process is crucial. However, regional and class consciousness often restrict parents’ voices. Additionally, the society still lacks a supportive community network for ECD⁹. Fragmented approaches like parent focus

⁴<https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/what-are-three-obstacles-encountered-by-early-childhood-education/> - Date:14/07/2024, Time: 11:39 AM

⁵ Ministry of Women and Child Development. National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy. New Delhi: Government of India, 2013

⁶ https://nios.ac.in/media/documents/376_ECCE_PDF/Book1/5_Issues_and_Directions_in_ECCE.pdf

⁷ https://nios.ac.in/media/documents/376_ECCE_PDF/Book1/5_Issues_and_Directions_in_ECCE.pdf

⁸ https://nios.ac.in/media/documents/376_ECCE_PDF/Book1/5_Issues_and_Directions_in_ECCE.pdf

⁹<https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/what-are-three-obstacles-encountered-by-early-childhood-education/> - Date:14/07/2024, Time: 11:39 AM

groups, support groups for special needs children, and CBTs are expensive and accessible only in urban areas.

Q2.

Parental influence includes actions, beliefs, attitudes, coping mechanisms, and teaching styles. Simple conversations with the right attitude can engage children and promote cognitive development¹⁰. Children also consider their parents as role models while learning social skills. Therefore, manners, sharing, and social behavior pass naturally to the children. For instance, a child from a Narcissistic family either becomes codependent, passive-aggressive, or emotionally indifferent in a social setting (school, community). Home environment including parental daily routine, food habits, self-care routine, and parental relationship also reflects in children's emotional health and concept of self. Naturally, a sedentary lifestyle at home tends to make children obese with higher screen time. Positive self-concept depends on realistic expectations and parental value-based behavior. For instance, bully survivor children should learn that there are other ways than flight/fight behavior while bully children should understand they are doing wrong. In both cases, parental support and the right attitude matter a lot. An abused child at home always going to react in different social settings as he/she feels isolated and disengaged. Parents need a specific child-rearing action plan (individualistic) since conception. An extrovert, socially winning first child does not mean the ambivert second child will go the same way.

Parents in rural and semi-urban settings, often miss resources and support groups for particular needs. Moreover, too much rigidity in parental behavior develops emotional distance from the children. Indian parents (low to middle-earning families) tend to run behind job security and educational certificates without considering their children's career outlooks. Authoritarian Parenting has high expectations without flexibility and that style suffocates children. Highly critical attitudes make children too obedient without the scope of experiments. As a result, their low self-esteem faces socially awkward situations and they face high degrees of depression and anxiety¹¹. Permissive parenting has a friendly warmth but that can induce immature behavior and a "flight" coping mechanism. However, children under this parenting umbrella demonstrate better social skills. Uninvolved parenting develops attachment issues, a sedentary lifestyle, and mental disorders¹². Interestingly, parents cannot choose a specific parenting style as their personal values, ethics, and personality type determine the style. At this point, professional help (sociologists, community nurses, child psychologists) and resources (community support, teacher, and school-level discussions) are required.

¹⁰<https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/parental-influence-affect-child-development/#:~:Date:14/07/2024>, Time: 4:30 PM

¹¹<https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/parental-influence-affect-child-development/#:~:Date:14/07/2024>, Time: 4:30 PM

¹²<https://www.euroschoolindia.com/blogs/parental-influence-affect-child-development/#:~:Date:14/07/2024>, Time: 4:30 PM

Q3.

The digital era has come a long way since the evolution of primal and prehistoric parenting styles. Rearing practices in the Vedic period were culture and system-based. For instance, the social classes and stricter roles of male and female parents used to teach great moral values and discipline in the early years¹³. Pre-2000s have observed somewhat distinguished roles of male and female parents. However, with technological advancement, remote job settings, and overseas job scopes, the boundaries of such roles are blurred. There was a time when exclusively the father's name was required for school admission. But, Indian society has become more accepting and liberal now. Community and social settings accept single parents, working mothers, need of special children, and emotional health. Post-2000s are more attentive to the holistic growth and development of children. A post-2000 era mother has no problem teaching her children about good and bad touch. Although the education system has the same challenges pre and post-2000s, the home attitude towards them has significantly changed. Unfortunately, the parental approaches are still fragmented, and policy reforms are inadequate.

Q4.

As traditional parenting has been transitioning post-2000s, therefore, current parents use more open dialogues to deal with generational gaps and conflicts¹⁴. Moreover, modernization and globalization have developed a harmonious balance between culture and society. Parents are no longer hyper-critical of children's social behavior. The trend of acceptance is reflected in various social media posts. Post-2000s parents are more aware of resources and alternatives. They are used to multimedia devices and know the "where and how" of parenting. They are open to discussion and ready to change. In terms of state and country-based educational systems, policymakers still face major challenges. For instance, child education is still considered women-led, and free, compulsory education per Article 45 is still not implemented¹⁵. Of course, ECCE programs show a higher (state-based) enrolment count post-2000s but NCERT and ASER reports (2023) are concerned about struggling children with curriculum. Additionally, the focus is too much on children before the age of 6 with NIPUN. But, government-led ECE programs should cover learning until the age of 8¹⁶.

Limitation

Although ECDP means multiple other things in addition to education, this paper only aims at the challenges of early childhood education. Moreover, pre and post-colonial eras have witnessed some significant changes in Indian parenting lifestyles. For instance, the Vedic

¹³https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374589219_The_Evolution_of_Parenting_Styles_Traditional_vs_Modern_Approaches_to_Child_Rearing_Abstract-Date: 14/07/2024, Time: 5:27 PM

¹⁴<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2305G67.pdf>-Date: 14/07/2024, Time: 4:39 PM

¹⁵<https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/overhauling-early-childhood-education>-Date: 14/07/2024, Time: 5:22 PM

¹⁶<https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/overhauling-early-childhood-education>-Date: 14/07/2024, Time: 5:22 PM

education system faced major conflicts with the Western education system during the British era. Oppression during that period developed a timid, clerk population group in India¹⁷. Obviously, their parental lifestyle was overtly strict and those parents had economic uncertainty too. The undivided family model also faced major socioeconomic problems back then. These factors must have had multidimensional effects during the Cold War and 90s parental lifestyles. However, those specific changes are not included here.

Conclusion

It is observed that modern Indian parents are aware of different parenting style and their impact on children. However, the spontaneous effect of parental lifestyle is still under-explored and most of the government-led ECE models are overtly generalized. Furthermore, trained teachers and activity-based learning models are not utilized properly. A teacher-community-parent support network covering all states can improve the resource-access problems. Learning resources on parental lifestyle should be available for free considering 50% of the rural non-active internet users¹⁸. ECE programs in rural and semi-urban areas need more experienced teachers and safety protocols for pieces of educational equipment. Overall, more scholarly and practical investment is required to increase parental awareness of the impact on children.

¹⁷ Mukhopadhyay, Anindita, Dalia Chakrabarti, *Colonial Clerks: A Social History of Deprivation and Domination* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Company), *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2010.

¹⁸ <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/hsp10/chapter/ecce-in-india-ecce-ece-eed/>-Date: 15/07/2024, Time: 4:28 PM

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