

Do childcare arrangement when mothers work affect child health

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Childcare has received a great deal of attention from researchers in industrialized and developing countries in recent years, mainly due to increasing labour force participation of women with young children in both settings. With the rising female work participation, childcare is becoming increasingly complex, as the mother's role needs to be balanced with work outside the home. The care of the young children is one of the few functions of family that is universally accepted through time and across culture. However, there exist variations in pattern of childcare in different parts of the world. Researchers seem to disagree on intra-household time substitutions as a result of mother's labour force participation and its net effect on the average nutritional status of young children (Smith et al 1983; Ryan et al, 1984; Blau, 1981; Popkin, 1980).

OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to find out who is the caretaker of the child when women are engaged in work apart from their housework. An attempt has also been made to gain an understanding if there is any impact of childcare arrangement on child health. Bhat and Rajan (1992) inferred from their study that mortality risk increases when children are deprived of paternal care. Paternally deprived children in India have 20 per cent higher risk of mortality compared with children who are living with both the parents.

The following specific questions were addressed to in this study:

1. Who is more likely to be the caretaker of the child when the women are at work?
2. Do the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the mother determine childcare arrangement?
3. What are the characteristics of fathers who assist their spouses in childcare?
4. Is the health of the child affected by who the child is left with when the mother is at work?

DATA AND METHODS

Sources of data

The data for the present study has been extracted from:

1. National Family Health Survey (NFHS - II) 1998-99 for India

2. Demographic Health Survey 1997 for Indonesia
3. Demographic Health Survey Philippines (1998) for Philippines.

Data on caretaker of children has been collected only for those working women who have youngest child aged below three years (or below five years in case if Indonesia and Philippines) and are living at home. In order to make a comparison between the three countries, children below three years of age have been selected for Indonesia as well as Philippines. To be specific, those women form the sample for this study who:

- i. are currently working (India and Philippines) or worked in last 12 months prior to the survey (Indonesia);
- ii. have a child of less than three years; and

Women who usually take the child to their place of work or work at home have been considered as being the caretaker themselves.

The rationale for the selection of these countries is the availability of data and the concentration of particular religious groups in majority in each of these countries, viz, Hindus, Muslims and Christians respectively.

Analysis of data

The data has been analyzed by cross tabulations and the results have been explained in terms of simple percentages. Correlation analysis has been applied to find out the factor/ factors that are significant in each of the selected countries.

FINDINGS

Care by mothers themselves is prominent in all the countries under study, though there are variations in percentages of women taking care of children while they are at work (just above 40% in India and Indonesia and 31% in Philippines). Children being left to the care of relatives form the second most important category.

Around 9 to 14 percent of children are taken care of by their female siblings as compared to 2 to 4 percent of male siblings. As low as around 2-2.5% of fathers are caretakers in India and Indonesia whereas much higher proportion of children are looked after by their fathers in Philippines (12%). Working mothers in Philippines are more likely to leave their child to the care of servants or hired help followed by Indonesia.

The results also suggest that institutional care is almost negligible in Indonesia and India and is absent for children below three years in Philippines.

When analyzed by type of **place of residence**, it is evident that the percentage of women who take care of their children themselves while they work is higher in rural areas than in urban areas except for India. Among urban women of Philippines, relatives form the highest proportion of caretakers while in the other two countries, the women themselves look after their children when they are at work.

Educational attainment of women does not show consistent results with the mothers' choice of caretaker for their young children. It may be noted, however, that the proportion of mothers being caretakers themselves showed very little variation by mother's educational level in India.

With regards to the **occupation of women**, 18 to 20 percent of women engaged in clerical jobs in Indonesia and Philippines opt for servants or hired help. Indian women, on the other hand, are more likely to prefer their relatives as caretakers for their children.

The Correlation analysis based on the caretaker and mother's characteristics depicts country-specific association between the variables. Type of employer, mother's occupation and type of earning emerged as significant variables for India. For Indonesia, the variables that turned out to be significant were women's occupation and her partner's occupation. Type of place of residence, women's educational level and partner's education level showed significant association with the caretaker in Philippines.

The effect of childcare arrangement on child health has been assessed by the analyzing the prevalence of acute respiratory infection (ARI), fever and diarrhea by caretaker. It is expected that children looked after by mothers or by their relatives have better health status than those who are left to hired arrangement.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that a substantial proportion of working women are overburdened with dual work, that of childcare and breadwinner. There is a little evidence that husbands help their wives in

looking after the children while the women are at work. Though, the attitudes of people are changing, the belief that women's role is oriented more exclusively toward marriage and children, still persists in the selected south-east Asian countries.