

Indian Fathers - Then and Now: Comparing and Contrasting Father's Roles across Two Generations and Its Impact on Paternal Involvement

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Abstract:

Paternal involvement in childcare may be determined by different sets of determinants, paternal, maternal and/or child characteristics. Zoja (2001) observes, the role to be played by today's father is taught by the fathers of the preceding generations. Using a sample of 350 Indian fathers, this study attempts to explore whether fathering has changed over two generations, and if yes, in what regard? The study further proposes to find out whether fathering received by an individual (as perceived by an individual) affects his paternal involvement. Findings indicate that fathers in the previous generation mostly portrayed themselves as disciplinarians to their children whereas present-day fathers in this role are on the decline. Results of multiple regression show that fathers who perceived that they have received low level of fathering are more likely to depict low paternal involvement. The study suggests that improving paternal involvement has important implications for the future generations.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of father participation in child care has been felt over decades. Importance of paternal status was emphasized as early as 1960s by Margaret Mead (1962). Earlier researches have shown that men's share of childcare has several predictors, fathering received by an individual being an important predictor. Zoja (2001) observes, the role to be played by today's father is taught by the fathers of the preceding generations.

There have been several studies regarding fathering the individual received from his father (e.g., Parke 2002; Pleck 1997; Haas 1988; Sagi 1982), but these studies present conflicting findings. In some cases, there is evidence in support of modeling hypothesis while compensation hypothesis is supported by other researches. Finally, a third group of studies found that paternal involvement and own fathers' involvement are unrelated (Gerson 1993; Radin 1994).

The present study aims to explore whether fathering has changed over two generations, and if yes, in what regard? The study further proposes to find out whether fathering received by an individual (as perceived by an individual) affects his paternal involvement.

DATA AND METHODS

The Sample

The study is based on interviews conducted with 350 fathers residing in Mumbai, the largest city of India. The men in the sample are biological fathers to at least one child aged 10 years or below. Equal number of fathers from single-earner and dual-earner families has been included in the study. Fathers have been selected by purposive quota sampling procedure. This work is a part of a larger study wherein both fathers and mothers were interviewed and data regarding fathering was collected for the youngest child of the respondent father-mother pair; henceforth, referred to as the "Focal Child."

Analysis

The analysis of data has been done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) package. Univariate and bivariate techniques have been used for the analysis of data. Results have mainly been explained through contingency tables. Multiple regression has been performed to find out whether father's level of involvement is predicted by the respondent's view of the level of fathering he received. Scaling technique has been used in the present study namely, Paternal Involvement in Child Care Index (PICCI), Self-esteem Scale, exposure to mass media, etc.. The reliability of these scales has been tested and alpha values (Cronbach's α) have been calculated.

Variables

Paternal Involvement in Child Care Index (PICCI) – Radin's (1982) PICCI is a summated measure which consists of five components: statement of involvement; participation in child care; participation in socialization; influence in child rearing decisions; and availability. If a father is more involved with the child, one would

expect him to obtain a higher score on the instrument. The total score for both the parent ranged from 0-144 (Mean=72.3, Standard Deviation=16.4).

Exposure to mass media – Exposure to mass media was determined by adding up the scores of 4 items on a three-point scale: frequency of reading newspapers, listening to radio, watching television, and watching movies. Fathers with higher scores were categorized as having relatively more exposure to mass media.

Gender Role Expectation – Gender Role Expectation was measured by an instrument consisting of a series of questions about attitudes concerning the roles of men and women on the lines suggested by Oheneba-Sakyi and Rollins (1989). On a 5-point scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree), fathers indicated the magnitude of their agreement or disagreement on 7 statements, some of which are as follows: “Women should take care of running their homes and leave the rest up to men” and “A woman can be a good wife and mother even if she has a very demanding job”. Lower values indicated more traditional attitude while the higher values on this index meant less traditional attitude.

Self-esteem – This aspect was measured by Rosenberg’s (1965, 1979) 10-item Self-esteem Scale. Responses were coded on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher values on the scale meant higher self-esteem. Sample items include: “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” “I feel that I have a number of good qualities,” “In all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure” and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of.”

Satisfaction from occupation – Father’s satisfaction from occupation was measured by the extent of agreement on 8 statements coded on five-point Likert-type scale. Responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Sample items included in this index are: “The working hours are not fit for me,” “I get recognition for my good work” and “People less capable than me are able to earn more.” Responses to items were summed, item means were used, and higher scores reflect more satisfaction from occupation.

Peer Perception – To assess attitude of the peer group, fathers were asked, “What is the perception of your peer group regarding husband’s helping their wives in household work and childcare?” It was an open-ended question and the responses were grouped into three categories: positive attitude, negative attitude and do not know/ do not care.

Fathering received by the father – This aspect was determined through items similar to those included in PICCI after suitably rewording them. Scoring was also done in the same way as the PICCI. It may be noted that this index measures the (respondent) fathers’ perception about fathering received by them and not the role played by their fathers as reported by others in the family.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Table 1 shows that fathers’ participation in ‘traditionally female childcare tasks’ like feeding the child, bathing and dressing the child, putting child to bed have nearly doubled when we compare recent fathers to their fathers. However, the proportion of

respondents doing these tasks is still very low, varying between 6 to 11 per cent for different activities.

Father's role as a 'playmate, friend, and teacher' (his participation in helping the child with personal problems, playing with the child, and helping the child to learn) has increased only slightly proving that fathers have been seen in this role from the past and it continues even today.

The striking result is the change in the father's role as a disciplinarian (punishing the child and setting limits to child's behaviour). The figures clearly show that whereas 45 and 43 percent of fathers have reported that their fathers punished them or set limits for their behaviour respectively, only 4 percent say that they punish their child and 10 percent admit that they set limits for their child's behavior.

Other noticeable result are the figures corresponding to 'taking child out' and 'taking child to doctor' which shows that fathers' participation has reversed, that is to say, fathers in the previous generation seem to be doing more of these activities than the present generation. It can be seen that the respondents' participation in these two activities has nearly half or is even lesser than the preceding generation. The plausible reason being that a couple of decades ago, women would be confined to home and most of the tasks that were to be done out of the house were taken care of by the men folk.

Overall, it may be said that fathers in the previous generation were mostly portrayed as disciplinarians and playmate, friend and teacher. Present day fathers model their fathers in the role of playmate, friend and teacher. However, fathers acting as disciplinarians to their children are on the decline.

I attempted to compare respondent fathers with their fathers using a global measure of participation by asking them "On an average, how much time per day do you/did your father devote to child's/your prime care-giving?" (as compared to time spent on primary childcare by wife/mother). The responses are presented in the Table 2. The figures reveal that the majority of the respondents (74%) say that they devote somewhere between 21-40% of time to their children whereas the corresponding figure for time spent by their fathers is 40%. The proportion of fathers who said that they spend more than 40% of time to primary childcare has not changed over the years, the proportion having increased only slightly – from 7 to 10 per cent.

Table 3 shows the responses of fathers about how they would rate themselves and their fathers in terms of paternal involvement. Results indicate that majority of the fathers report themselves as 'involved' or 'very much involved' fathers (92%). Looking at the perception of respondents regarding their fathers' involvement in their care, it is seen that most of the respondents (65%) rate their fathers as 'involved' or 'very much involved'. The results of crosstabulation (not shown) reveal that 55% of the respondents put themselves as well as their fathers in the same category of involvement, these categories being 'neither involved nor uninvolved,' 'very much involved' or 'involved' (all of them depicting either neutral or positive response towards the fathering received). None of the fathers who said that their fathers were 'very much uninvolved' or 'uninvolved' are themselves such fathers. On the contrary, out of a total of 6 fathers who rate themselves as 'very much uninvolved' or

'uninvolved' fathers, none put their fathers in these categories. It may therefore, be reiterated that men model their fathers only if they perceive their own father's involvement in positive terms. Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) merit citation in this regard who observed that the son may model his own father's level of involvement if the son's affective response to it is positive but compensate for it if his response is negative.

Father's level of involvement in child care was measured using Radin's (1982) Paternal Involvement in Child care Index (PICCI). The analysis (Table 4) revealed that three fifths of the fathers are moderately involved in childcare. Fathers who portray a low level of paternal involvement outnumber those highly involved, by five percent. A look at the corresponding figures for father's father indicate that a slightly higher proportion (68%) fall in the category of moderate involvement.

As for the father's experiences in his family of origin, some research suggests that the father's relationship with his father may be a factor either through identifying with his father or compensating for his father's lapses – in contributing to his own role identification, sense of commitment, and self-efficacy (Cowan and Cowan, 1987; Daly, 1995). Table 5 presents results of analysis of variables related to father's father and paternal involvement. With regard to the relative time spent by father's (respondent's) father in his care during his childhood, the results show no significant effect on the contribution of fathers in childcare. However, the level of fathering received by the father seems to have influenced paternal involvement. As also proved by the above mentioned studies, the way fathers look at the fathering they received is an important predictor of participation (Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Engle and Breaux, 1994) and is also found to be highly significant. The table clearly illustrates that as the perceived level of fathering increases from low to high involvement, the proportion of fathers being highly involved also increases and vice versa. In other words, fathers who perceive that they had received low or moderate level of fathering are less likely to depict high paternal involvement.

Using multiple regression, we tried to verify whether fathering received by father predicts paternal involvement even when controlled for other demographic, economic, socio-cultural and psychological characteristics of the respondents. The dependent variable here is the level of respondents' paternal involvement as measured by PICCI. As can be seen in the above table (Table 6), the results of crosstabulations are well supported by regression analysis.

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Table 1. Percentage distribution of fathers according to their involvement in their child's care and their perception of their father's involvement in their care.

CHILD CARE TASKS		Fathers (n=350)	Father's father (n=350)
1.	Feeding the child/ Make the child to eat	7.4	2.0
2.	Having sole responsibility for the child	13.4	12.9
3.	Bathing and dressing the child/ Get the child to bathe and dress	6.3	3.4
4.	Putting the child to bed/ Help the child to go to bed	11.4	6.0
5.	Helping the child with personal problems	24.6	20.1
6.	Play with the child	38.6	31.8
7.	Taking child out	21.1	60.0
8.	Take child to doctor	26.3	53.1
9.	Helping the child to learn	22.9	21.0
10.	Punishing the child	4.0	44.7
11.	Setting limits for the child's behaviour	10.6	43.3

Table 2. Percentage distribution of fathers according to time spent in their child's care and their perception of their father's time spent in their care.

Time Spent in Child Care	Fathers (n=350)	Father's father (n=302)
0-20%	16.3	52.3
21-40%	73.7	40.4
41+%	10.0	7.3

Table 3. Percentage distribution of fathers according to their overall involvement in their child's care and their perception of their father's overall involvement in their care.

Overall Father Involvement	Fathers (n=350)	Father's father (n=350)
Very much uninvolved	0.3	3.4
Uninvolved	1.4	2.3
Neither uninvolved nor involved	6.6	29.7
Involved	71.7	56.3
Very much involved	20.0	8.3

Table 4. Percentage distribution of the fathers by their level of involvement.

Paternal Involvement	Fathers (n=350)	Father's father (n=350)
Low	22.3	17.1
Moderate	60.0	68.3
High	17.7	14.6

Table 5. Percentage distribution of the fathers according to their involvement by time spent by their fathers in their (respondents') care and level of fathering received by them.

Characteristics	Low	Moderate	High	Number of Fathers
Time spent by father's father in childcare				
Upto 25%	25.0	58.2	16.8	196
25% to 50 %	16.0	62.3	21.7	106
Total	21.9	59.6	18.5	302
Level of fathering received by the father***				
Low	40.0	43.3	16.7	60
Moderate	20.9	64.4	14.6	239
High	(7.8)	58.8	33.3	51
Total	22.3	60.0	17.7	350

*** $p \leq .001$.

Table 6. Coefficients from OLS model predicting paternal involvement in child care.

Independent Variables	Paternal Involvement		
	B	S.E	β
Fathering received by the father	0.533	0.108	0.247***
Father's age	0.169	0.168	0.058
Father's education	2.361	1.393	0.107 [#]
Mother's education	3.029	1.324	0.149**
Focal child's age	1.167	0.416	0.163**
Focal child's sex	3.094	1.583	0.096 [#]
Father's working hours	-0.149	0.057	-0.135**
Maternal employment status and difference in income of husband and wife	0.437	1.034	0.022
Family Type	-5.081	1.688	-0.156**
Gender role expectation	-0.367	0.222	-0.090 [#]
Father's self-esteem	0.256	0.291	0.045
Father's satisfaction from occupation	0.095	0.234	0.023
Perception of peer group	-2.810	1.000	-0.139**
Exposure to mass media	0.691	0.606	0.060
Constant	43.67		
Adjusted R^2	.30		
N	345		

[#] $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.