

Mothers Management of their Child's After-school Activities and the Well-being of Children

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ABSTRACT The present investigation was an exploratory attempt to examine daily activity profile and the well-being of children of employed and non-employed mothers. A representative sample of 180 mothers (90 employed mothers and 90 non-employed mothers, having eldest child of 6-9 years) belonging to nuclear families of Udaipur, Rajasthan were selected. Data were collected using self-structured Interview schedule (Child's after-school activity schedule). The results of the study revealed that the employed mothers' children's major part of after school time was devoted to skill classes, academics and watching TV and least time was given to interaction with persons, parents and play. In comparison to this, non-employed mothers' children's, major portion of after school time is devoted to TV watching, academics, skill classes and playing videogames. In both the cases, less time is given to play during after school hours. In employed mothers children, more than 80% mothers reported that their children are facing well-being problems "always" whereas in case of non-employed mothers', approximately 55% reported "sometimes, regarding well-being problems. Thus, it is evident that children are having no time during after school hours for play and available free time is devoted to sedentary activities like TV watching and playing videogames instead of playing freely. The results of the study revealed that highly significant difference was found between employed and non-employed mothers' children in their after school hours as well as well-being of children

INTRODUCTION

"If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for ten years, plant trees. If you plan for a hundred years, educate your children".

(Chinese proverb)

Children constitute the principal asset of any country. Middle childhood (6-9 years) is the time of important developmental advances that establish children's sense of identity. During these years, children make strides towards adulthood by becoming competent, independent, and self-conscious individuals imbibing values and ideals from the world beyond the limits of their families. Biological and cognitive changes transform children's bodies and minds. Social relationships and roles change dramatically as children enter school, join programs, and mingle with peers and adults outside their families.

In the Indian scenario, major part of child care is for mothers as compared to fathers. Many studies show that women have the primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children (Biernat and Wortman 1991), and women are more likely than men to adapt their work lives to accommodate child related concerns. Some theorists have claimed that women are, by nature,

more nurturing and relational than men, whereas men are, by nature, less emotional and more distant than women (Chodorow 1978).

In many families, the protective influences of both unstructured play and high-quality parent-child time are negatively affected by the current trends of highly structured after school time activity pattern of children as well as maternal employment. Breaking down of joint family into nuclear ones also has an impact on childcare. Nuclear families lack custodial care facilities and children are likely to engage in structured activities. These activities leave no time for free play. Clements (2004), in his study revealed that non-employed mothers provide less structured activities to their children during after school time as compared to employed mothers. Though non-employed mothers provide more unstructured time to child during after school hours but, the maximum time is spent on watching TV, playing videogames as compared to free play activities.

Childhood is a significant part of life and play is a crucial part of childhood. It is the responsibility of parents to protect their youngsters and launch them successfully into independent roles in the broader community. Parents, with specific reference to mothers, should understand the

importance of play and should provide ample opportunities for unstructured time for free play in child's life. Mothers must not turn play into work and must not teach children during their play period. But due to the limited awareness of mothers regarding the significance of free play, children are deprived of their right to play and becoming a 'scheduled child'.

Therefore, for the sake of both individual and global development, there is an emerging need to know what mothers feel towards children's after school time activity pattern. Hence, the present study was planned with the objective to study the time management of child's after school activities by the employed and non-employed mothers and assess the well-being problems of children.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of the study comprised of 180 mothers belonging to nuclear families, residing in Udaipur, a city of Rajasthan state. Further, the mothers were subdivided into two groups according to employment of mothers:

- 1) 90 employed mothers
- 2) 90 non-employed mothers

The first group comprised of 90 employed mothers, was further sub-divided into three groups, i.e. 30 mothers employed in professional jobs, 30 mothers employed in semi-professional jobs and 30 mothers employed in non-professional jobs. Further, these three groups were again divided equally, according to the gender of the child i.e. mothers of 15 boys and mothers of 15 girls were selected. Similarly, the second and third group of mothers were selected according to the gender of the child, i.e. mothers of 15 boys and mothers of 15 girls.

The second group comprised of 90 non-employed mothers and was further sub-divided into two groups according to the gender of the child, i.e. mothers of 45 boys and mothers of 45 girls.

Sample Selection: The preliminary survey was conducted on 360 (twice of sample) children ranging between 6-9 years, studying in private and government schools, to obtain the information regarding their mother's education, profession and address. Then, through random sampling method, a list of final sample of mothers was

prepared. Thus, it comprised of 90 employed and 90 non-employed mothers, making total 180 mothers.

Tools used for Data Collection: Selected subjects were contacted personally for data collection. Data were collected using Self-structured Interview schedule (Child's after school activity schedule), which was prepared after exhaustive consultation of theoretical and empirical researches. The tool consisted questions in the form of table format and likert scale for obtaining the qualitative and quantitative data regarding after school activity pattern of child and their well-being.

Interview schedule assess the mother's management of child's after school time. The schedule had 2 areas, i.e. i) Child's Daily Activity Profile (After School Time), ii) Child's Well-being

Area-I Child's Daily Activity Profile (After School Time) - The area assessed the daily activity profile of the child after completion of school timing. It included a table format of daily activities which child does during after school hours. The sequence, time, duration, during activities were assessed in this area.

Area- II Child's Well-being- The area of schedule was assessing the effect on child's well-being due to after school time management. It was in the form of likert technique. The area had two sub-parts: Physical problems and Psychological problems of children. It included 9 physical problems and 10 psychological problems, a total 19 problems related to child's well-being.

Scoring Pattern: Area-I Child's Daily Activity Profile (After School Time) - Frequency, percentages and average for After school time activities were conducted were calculated.

Area-II Child's Well-being- The area was constructed in the form of likert scale. The levels of problems (physical and psychological) were ranging between Always, Sometimes and Never categories. Weighted scores were given for each category i.e. '3' for 'Never'; '2' for 'Sometimes' and '1' for 'Always'. It predicts highest the score, lesser the problems faced by children. The area included 19 items were giving highest score ranges, were prepared by interpretations of scores (Table1).

Data Analysis: The responses obtained were coded, tabulated and percentages were calculated to depict the after school activities and the well-being of the children. The difference in the after school activities and well-being was measured by z-test.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The time children spend out-of-school is critical to their development. The hours outside the school day comprise more than 90% of a school-age child's time in a given year, and activities during those hours can provide opportunities to learn social skills, develop new interests and competencies, and form meaningful relationships with caring adults. For many children, however, those hours are a time fraught with risks to their healthy development. What children are doing, where they are, and the quality of adult supervision they receive during out-of-school time, all affect school achievement and adult success.

Table 2 shows that employed mothers children devoted major portion of after school time to skill classes (116 minutes) and academic activity (101.5 minutes). While among non-employed mothers childrens' majority of time was spent in watching TV (89 minutes) and academic activity (87 minutes).

Further table 2 clearly reveals that majority of time in employed mothers' boys (115 minutes) and girls (117 minutes) were devoted to 'skill

classes'. The probable reason behind it may be that due to lack of custodial care in a dual earner family, they send their children to activity centers. Another reason could be that employed parents have lot of aspirations and expectations from their child to succeed in each area of life. Thus, they send them to become 'perfect' in this competitive world. The results are supported by the study of Jago (2006) who found that dual-earner parents are enrolling their very young children in lessons and other structured activities. For example, between 1999 and 2003, the percentage of Canadian six- and seven-year-olds who took organized lessons (e.g., gymnastics, martial arts, etc.) increased from 23% to 30% and the percentage participating in coached sports increased from 36% to 41%.

A study conducted by Mahoney (2006) also found the same results, that in these competitive days, employed mothers are often compelled to work for 10 hours a day, just to keep up and sometimes they feel their kids have to study equally hard, or learn music, or learn an extra language, or practice a sport, or all of these to compete with their peers.

Table 1: Interpretations of scores of child's well-being

Number of items × maximum score	Number of items × minimum score	Problems		
19 × 3(57)	19 × 1(19)	Always Never 19-31	Sometimes 32-44	57-57

Table 2: Mean and Percentage distribution of child's daily activity profile (after school time)

S.No	Activity employed mothers (90)			Non-employed mothers (90)		
	Boys (45)	Girls (45)	Total (90)	Boys (45)	Girls (45)	Total (90)
1 Self-care	40 (7.53)	35 (6.59)	37.5(7.06)	43 (8.36)	46(8.66)	44.5(8.50)
2 Food	51 (9.60)	44 (8.28)	47.5(8.95)	54 (10.50)	54(10.16)	54(10.32)
3 Rest and nap	36 (6.77)	53 (9.98)	44.5(8.38)	45 (8.75)	53 (9.98)	49(9.36)
4 Academics	97(18.26)	106 (19.96)	101.5(19.13)	89 (17.31)	85(16.80)	87((16.63))
· Tuition	60 11.29)	90 (16.94)	75(14.13)	50 (9.72)	50 (9.41)	50(9.56)
· Homework	37 (6.29)	16 (3.01)	26.5(4.99)	25 (4.86)	25 (4.70)	25(4.78)
· Self study	0 (0)	0 (0)	0(0)	14 (2.72)	10 (1.88)	12(2.29)
5 Play time	25 (4.70)	23 (4.33)	24(4.52)	40 (7.78)	39 (7.34)	39.5(7.55)
6 Watching TV	58(10.92)	71 (13.37)	64.5(12.15)	88 (17.12)	90 (16.94)	89(17.01)
7 Playing videogame/ computer game	70(13.18)	43 (8.09)	56.5(10.65)	43 (8.36)	51 (9.60)	47(8.98)
8 Reading books	2 (0.37)	3 (0.56)	2.5(0.47)	4 (0.77)	10 (1.88)	7(1.33)
9 Skill classes	115(21.65))	117((22.03)	116(21.86)	79 (15.36)	75(14.12)	77(14.72)
10 Interaction with person	2 (0.37)	3 (0.56)	2.5(0.47)	8 (1.50)	3 (0.56)	5.5(1.05)
11 Visits	3 (0.56)	4 (0.75)	3.5(0.65)	3 (0.58)	4 (0.75)	3.5(0.66)
12 Interaction with parents	3 (0.56)	4 (0.75)	3.5(0.65)	7 (1.36)	11 (1.55)	9(1.72)
13 Commuting time	30 (5.64)	25 (4.70)	27.5(5.18)	11 (2.14)	13 (2.44)	12(2.29)
14 After school time	531minutes (100)	530minutes (100)	530.5minutes (100)	515minutes (100)	531 minutes (100)	523minutes (100)

Parents with higher educational levels and more income, tend to influence their children to participate in educationally beneficial activities and can pay for more enrichment lessons than can parents with lower education and less income. However, some parents living in inner-city neighborhoods expend great amounts of energy to seek out resources for their children. Importantly, after-school program attendance provides children from low-income families with access to the types of enrichment activities that middle-class children typically experience (Hofferth and Jankuniene 2001).

The non-employed mothers childrens' majority of time (89 minutes) was devoted to "watching TV" during after school hours. Table 2 estimates that children spend an average of about three hours a day in front of a screen watching television and playing video games. Rogoff (2003) also found same results in his study of 6-12 years childrens' after school hours. He found that majority of parents reported the activities as follows- watching TV (93%), skill classes (80%), watching videos (90%), organized sports (12%) done by their children during after school hours.

The probable reason may be that TV is taking place of child's play time as mothers feel insecurity and accidental problems when children play outside. Thus, they prefer their children should spend time at home in front of TV rather than outside. The results are supported by Clements (2004) who found that safety concerns, such as fear of crime are the main reason for the reduction in outdoor active play. An Australian study found that 54% of students, 6-11 years old, watched at least 20 hours of television a week (Commission 2004). Watching TV and playing videogames are supplementing the time that, children might spend playing outdoors or participating in other physical activities (Hancox 2004).

Another reason could be that children have more interest in watching TV as compared to playing outside. Albred (2006) in a study found that employed mothers reported that outdoor play has declined in both quantity and quality. They view this decline as due to children's lack of time for free play, too many interruptions and organized activities, and media's influence.

Evans (1995) claimed that more research is necessary to determine whether "children play less or play differently today". Television and

organized activities influence play. This view corresponds to the results found in this study. Dual-earner parents also pointed out that even the kind of organized activities that are arranged by them and siblings have limited children's time for play, even they do things during their leisure time. Another prominent finding of the study is that, mothers perceived that children today spent shorter time outdoors than the mothers did as children.

Table 2 clearly depicts that the second major part of after school time was devoted to "academic activity" in both employed mothers children (97 minutes) and non-employed mothers children (87 minutes). The reason may be that in today's society prime focus of parents is given to school performance and children are under pressure to perform according to school demands. Tough school demands are in terms of do and die examination pattern, lengthy curriculum, child to child class competition, heavy home work and parental competition to see their child top in the class as well as in their social circle.

Studies in India indicate that children are under pressure to perform as per school demands. It affects Indian childrens' organization of daily time (Verma and Gupta 1990). Singer (1993) found in a study that mothers' widespread involvement in school was mirrored by agreement that it was important for their children to excel in school (92%). The majority of mothers also believed that it was very important for their children to attend a top-level college/university (73%) and be highly successful in his/her profession (81%). It is likely that these mothers will continue to be involved in their children's education. Regarding free play in child's life, only 30 percent mothers reported that it's a need and 90% stated that their children have no time for free play.

The influence of school on the daily lives of Indian children, particularly on their daily use of time and their daily subjective experience is of concern. The effects of this type of "do-or-die" examination system on childrens' time use has been documented in East Asia, where children have been found to spend much larger portions of their waking hours doing schoolwork and much less time in leisure activities (Nishino 1997) than those in the US and Europe (Fulgini and Stevenson 1995).

Figure 1 clearly depicts that in "academic activity", major portion of children's time is

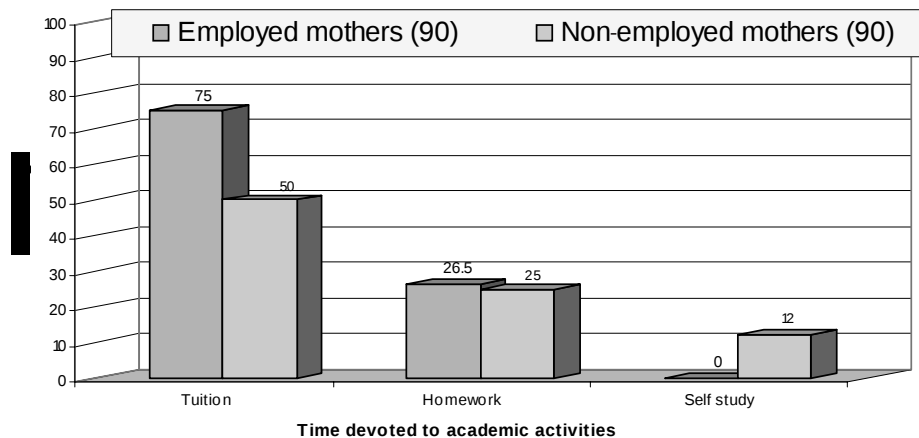


Fig. 1. Mean distribution of minutes devoted to academic activities during after- school hours

devoted to 'tuitions' rather than "self study" in both employed and non-employed category. The probable reason could be accounted that parents think tuitions are the best possible way to teach children. Parents might have a mindset that tutors are more experienced and have an expertise teaching aptitude as compared to others. Varma (1998) in his study on children found that in examining the daily influence of school on children's lives, it is important to look at the different contexts in which Indian children do academic work. As in East Asia, many middle-class Indian children are enrolled in after-school coaching classes or "tuitions". Originally, tuitions were meant for students who were lagging behind in the syllabus due to sickness, change of school, change of Education Boards, or other factors. But of late, as admission to various professional colleges has become more competitive and sought after, tuitions have become a normal pursuit for children. As a result, children are under pressure to deal not only with the academic work demands of the school but also with the demands of their tutors.

Second reason could be that sometimes parents think that at school level, the teacher have less time to focus or give attention to each and every child in classroom due to over- strength of children and short period of class time. And this gap can be fulfilled by tuition where tutors provide individual attention to each and every child in academics. "In classrooms, too, teachers become intent on covering the syllabus, often disregarding the comprehension level of students"

(Raina 1993). Partly because school success has such an important role in determining a child's future, it has come to be a critical measure of self-worth for young Indians; thus students and parents place major importance on the childrens' academic work (Varma 1998).

In the case of non-employed mothers, 'custodial care' of children is another reason for sending their children at tuition centers, where the children have to spend time in studies and do not have any option to waste time in watching TV or play freely. Research in India, however, suggests that women's employment may have at least one advantage: the educational status of children appears to be positively affected if women work (Kishor 1992).

Table 3 clearly indicates that a highly significant difference was found between employed and non-employed mothers' children's daily activity profile. Except 'visits', all the after school activities were found to be significantly different. It can be concluded that maternal employment affects significantly the child's after school activities. More financial stability and exposure to outer world, in the case of employed mothers provides more resources and lack of parental availability might be reasons for the difference in after school activities of employed and non-employed mothers children.

Children cannot remain healthy in the face of growing onslaught of media, technology, particularly when combined with inappropriate education, inadequate child care, hectic after school time life. All these are affecting adversely

Table 3: Z-test for difference between the employed mothers' children (boy and girls) with non-employed mothers' children (boy and girls) regarding their daily activity profile (after school time) N = 180

S. No.	Daily activity profile	Mean in minutes		Z value
		Employed mothers' children (90)	Non-employed mothers' children (90)	
1	Self care	37.33	44.78	5.007 **
2	Food	47.44	54.06	3.922 **
3	Rest and nap	44.54	49.27	2.942 **
4	Play time	24.10	39.61	8.065 **
5	TV watching	64.33	89.17	5.776 **
6	Videogame	56.61	46.33	2.659 **
7	Reading books	2.17	6.99	3.456 **
8	Skill class	116.06	77.00	6.829 **
9	Visits	3.50	3.56	.063 NS
10	Interaction with parents	3.33	7.61	3.885 **
11	Interaction with person	2.44	5.80	3.569 **
12	Academic activity	101.44	86.72	2.796 **
13	Commuting time	27.58	12.07	8.627 **

NS- Nonsignificant

** - Significant at 5 % level of significance

child's well-being directly as well as indirectly. Table 4 clearly reveals that majority of employed mothers (81.11%) reported "always" and non-employed mothers (53.33%) reported "sometimes" well-being problems among their children. The probable reason was children's daily activity profile. The children of both of the mothers spent major portion of after school hours in skill classes, TV watching, computer and videogame playing and academic activities instead of devoting their time in play activities. After a long hectic schedule of 6-7 hours in school, maximum after school time of children was firstly devoted to different skill

classes, in a long commuting time and rest of time goes in sitting passively in front of screen either computers or TV. Free play activities are reducing due to hectic schedule of children and lack of parental concern toward child's after school activities. Thus, it could be a reason for child's physical and psychological well-being affecting negatively.

Hancox (2004) found the same results in his longitudinal study that the average weeknight viewing TV for two hours, between the ages of 5 and 15 years was associated with higher BMI, lower fitness, and increase in total cholesterol. The conclusion of the study found that population attributable fractions indicate that 17% of overweight, 15% of raised serum cholesterol, 15% of poor fitness can be attributed to watching more than 2 hours of screen (TV, computer) a day. American Academy of Pediatrics issued a position paper in February 2001, which noted that children are influenced by TV messages, and have shown primary negative health effects on sexuality, academic performance, nutrition, obesity and aggressive and violent behavior. Edwards (2005) found a connection between technology and depression among children. Recent research has focused upon children's time is increasingly scheduled and organized, with structured activities taking up much of the after-school hours. During the after-school hours, majority of the free time continues to be spent watching television. Increasingly, children are engaged in a variety of structured activities such as sports and skill classes (Hofferth and Jakuniene 2000).

Table 5 shows that a significant difference was seen between well-being of employed and non-employed mothers children. The employed mothers' children were facing more well-being

Table 4: Percentage distribution of mothers regarding well-being problems of their children

S.No	Activity	Employed mothers (90)			Non-employed mothers (90)		
		Boys (45)	Girls (45)	Total (90)	Boys (45)	Girls (45)	Total (90)
1	Always	84.44	77.77	81.11	33.33	44.44	38.88
2	Sometimes	13.33	13.33	13.33	51.11	55.55	53.33
3	Never	2.22	8.88	5.55	15.55	-	7.77

Table 5: Z test for difference between the employed mothers' children (boy and girls) with non-employed mothers' children (boy and girls) regarding their child's well being

	Mean		Z value
	Employed mothers children	Non-employed mothers children	
Well-being of children	22.04	27.52	3.730 **

** Significant at 5% level of significance

problems. The reason could be that non-employed mothers provide more time to their children and less structured schedule during after school hours. Secondly, children have more free time for their own sake although they spend it in front of screen rather than free play, still they enjoy that time at fullest level. It lessens the well-being problems as compared to employed mothers children. A study conducted by Mahoney (2006) stated that, in these competitive days, employed mothers often have to work 10 hours day just to keep up and sometimes they feel their kids have to study equally hard, or learn the music, or learn an extra language, or practice a sport, or all of these to compete with their peers. Brook (2004) stated that, today's child is exposed to "Hurrying syndrome".

CONCLUSION

Childhood is not only a sensitive and vulnerable part of life but crucial from the standpoint of development. Today's children are growing up in a rapidly changing world characterized by dramatic shifts in their schedule. For becoming a "perfect child", they are pressurized by parents to attend many of structured activities during after school hours, which is creating less time, or no time for play than did children of previous generation and it is affecting their well-being negatively. Mothers are solely responsible for management of child's after school activities, either employed or non-employed.

Children after school activity profile shows that play time is lessened due to skill classes as well as the rest of the available time for play is devoted to TV watching or playing videogames which is affecting the well-being of the children. Thus, a mother should manage a child's after school time in such manner which creates a balance between play, academics and skill classes for bettering a child's well-being. However, more in-depth studies are needed to find out today's children's after school time activity pattern and effect on well-being. Thus, this study is pioneer research in this field and will prove an endeavor in this direction and will be helpful to understand today's children's after school activities and their well-being.

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