

# Exploring Parental Opinion, Attitudes and Practices: A Comparative Study on Child Care and Protection in Rural and Urban Communities in National Capital Region, India

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**Abstract:** ***Background:** Children are at risk of exploitation, abuse, violence and neglect as they are minors by law, innocent, dependant and defenseless. Parents play a significant role in child care and protection. **Objective:** To assess and compare opinion, attitude and practices of parents regarding care and protection of children in selected rural and urban community. **Materials and Methods:** This was a descriptive cross sectional survey which included 400 parents; 200 from rural (Dayalpur village, Haryana) and 200 from urban area (Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, Dakshinपुरi Extension, New Delhi). The data were collected using a structured interview schedule and analyzed using SPSS 17.0 and STATA 11.2 software. **Results:** All parents considered the Care of a child as mother's responsibility. The need of a child to be protected from sexual abuse and domestic violence was opined by 99.5% and 95.5% parents, respectively. Significantly higher number of urban parents as compared to rural had opinion that a child needs to be protected from psychological abuse and neglect (55.0% vs. 37.0%, 61.0% vs. 37.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ) respectively. The widespread belief was that commonly girls are victims of sexual abuse (99.5%). Majority of parents (99.8%) had positive attitude towards child care and protection. In majority of families mother generally punished the children at home (64.8%). **Conclusions:** Possibility of physical and sexual abuse of children was identified but there was lack of awareness regarding psychological abuse and neglect. Public education is required by community health personnel on parenting skills and care and protection issues.*

**Keywords:** opinion, attitude, practices, care, protection, child abuse, rural, urban

## 1. Introduction

The children of today are the future of tomorrow; children (0-14 years) comprise one third of the total population in India. <sup>[1]</sup> Early childhood is a crucial period for every child all over the world. This is the period when the child needs the cooperation and the supervision of the parents and other relatives the most. <sup>[2]</sup>

According to Article 19 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), "States parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent (s), legal guardian (s) or any other person who has the care of the child." India ratified the UNCRC in 1992. <sup>[3]</sup>

All children have the right to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. There is a huge gap between what should happen to children and the real-life situation of children. <sup>[4]</sup>

Traditionally in India, the responsibility of care and protection of children has been with families' and communities. A strong-knit patriarchal family that is meant to look after its children well has seldom had the realization that children are individuals with their own rights. Child abuse is shrouded in secrecy and there is a conspiracy of silence around the entire subject. <sup>[5]</sup> Millions Of children worldwide from all socio-economic backgrounds, across all ages, religions and cultures suffer violence, exploitation and

abuse every day. <sup>[6]</sup> In India; however, child abuse is an ill-identified entity. <sup>[7]</sup>

This implies the need for undertaking the present study so that the information can be further used by health professionals to explore and initiate specific interventions in relation to child care and protection. The objectives of this study were to assess and compare the opinions, attitudes and practices regarding care and protection of children among parents living in selected rural and urban community in northern India.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This was a cross-sectional, community-based study among parents living in selected rural (Dayalpur village) and urban (Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, Dakshinपुरi Extension) community in National Capital Region, India. As there is no published literature available on the opinion regarding care and protection of children, the sample size was estimated to be 400 parents (Urban-200, Rural-200). The available parent(s) were included. In rural community, from four mohallas-Harijan, Bisla, Hooda, Sarav; fifty parents and in urban community, from five blocks-1, 2, 3, 4 and 14; forty parents were interviewed. The interviewed parents had at least one child in the age group of 0-14 years, gave informed written consent for the study and could understand English/ Hindi. Parents who had critically or chronically ill or physically or mentally challenged children, who were caretakers of orphans and not willing to participate in the study, were excluded. Pilot study was conducted on 25 participants in Hari Nagar, Ashram, New Delhi. Data were collected by house-to-house visits by means of a self-developed

Structured Interview Schedule, which had four parts; **Part A** consisted of total 13 items related to demographic characteristics of the parents and children. **Part B** was opinionnaire consisted of 24 items having 18 questions with multiple responses and 6 questions with only one response. **Part C** was attitude scale, 4 point Likert scale with 24 items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. **Part D** practice questionnaire consisted of 9 items with multiple responses. Content validity was established by 6 experts. The reliability of the tool was established using test-retest method (after 4 days) on 10 subjects. A test of internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.97, showing the high level of internal consistency. Final study was conducted from June 2013 to December 2013. Participants who were the Mother or father or the legal guardian of the child were interviewed by the researcher for 25-30 minutes at their homes. Data were entered in Microsoft office excel 2007 and analyzed using SPSS 17.0 and STATA 11.2. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, mean, median, standard deviation, and range. Inferential statistics included Pearson chi-square test and Fisher's exact test to find the significance of difference in the responses of rural and urban community. The level of significance was  $p < 0.05$ . The study was approved by the Institute Ethics Committee of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Written informed consent was taken from the participants.

### 3. Results

The mean age of the parents was  $29.8 \pm 5.3$  years. Majority were in the age group of  $>25$  years (76.3%), females (86.3%) and married (96.8%) [Table 1]. There were a total of 829 children (1 to 5) in families and all children were living with their parents.

The constituents of caring as opined by majority of parents included fulfilling child's basic needs of food, shelter and clothing (97.8%), giving him/her love and affection (95.5%), keeping safe, secure and free from hazards (94.5%) and sending the child to school (92.8%) [Table 2].

Parents had opinion that a child needs to be protected from sexual abuse (99.5%), domestic violence (95.5%) and physical abuse (75.5%). Significantly higher number of urban parents as compared to rural opined that a child needs to be protected from psychological abuse and neglect (55.0% vs 37.0%, 61.0% vs 37.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ) respectively [Table 3].

All parents (100.0%) had opinion that child care is responsibility of mother. Significantly higher number of urban parents (74.5%) had opinion that father is responsible for care of a child as compared to rural parents (53.0%),  $p < 0.001$ . Higher number of rural parents (71.5%) had opinion that a child can be disciplined by physical punishment as compared to urban parents (56%), significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Majority of parents had opinion that a child may be punished by slapping (65.0%) and twisting his/her ear (40%), for both of which significantly higher number of the rural parents had the same opinion as compared to urban

parents (72.5% vs 57.5%, 46.5% vs 33.5%,  $p < 0.01$ ) respectively. Child abuse was identified as beating a child with shoe/ slipper/ scale/ belt (98.5%), forcing a child into sexual act with self or with others/ Prostitution (93.0%) and calling bad names to the child (91.0%) [Table 4].

More than half of the parents (53.5%) opined that it is not possible to cause psychological abuse to a child for which significantly higher number of parents from rural community (63.0%) had the same opinion as compared to urban (44%),  $p < 0.001$ .

All parents (100.0%) had opinion that sexual abuse of children is possible, in secluded places like old buildings (98.3%), vehicles (93.5%) construction sites (81.3%), fields (77.0%), friend's home (69.0%), playgrounds/parks (66.8%), relative's home (48.5%), school (48.3%) and their own home (25.5%). Majority (99.5%) opined that commonly girls are victims of sexual abuse than boys (51.8%). Significantly higher number of urban parents as compared to rural had opinion that sexual abuse of boys is possible (60.5% vs 43.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ). Sexual abuse of children is possible by strangers (100.0%), neighbours (88.5%), male servants (57.0%), teachers (48.8%), male relatives (41.3%). Significantly higher number of urban parents as compared to rural responded that teachers and siblings (54.0% vs. 43.5%, 19.5% vs 11%,  $p < 0.05$ ) respectively and parents (15.5% vs 7.0%,  $p < 0.01$ ) may abuse children sexually.

More than half of the parents (56.5%) had opinion that a child cannot be neglected by parents/caretakers, significantly higher number of rural parents (70%) had same opinion as compared to urban (43.0%),  $p < 0.001$ .

All parents (99.8%) had positive attitude, only one (0.3%) had negative attitude and no-one had neutral attitude.

In majority of families, mother generally punished the children at home (64.8%). Children are generally punished in significantly higher number of rural families as compared to urban, by mother (71.5% vs 58.0%,  $p < 0.01$ ), male relatives and female relatives (12.5% vs 1.5%, 11.5% vs 11.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ), for not obeying (71%), not studying (67.3%), not doing homework (64.8%) [Table 5].

The actions of parents if their child does not study/ do homework, does not score good marks and disobeys include talking to the child to find the reason (89%). Significantly higher number of rural parents as compared to urban parents responded that they will scold the child (82.0% vs 66.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ), give more attention and appreciation to other sibling (47.0% vs 24.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ) and give physical punishment like slap/ beat (74.0% vs 55.0%,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Significantly higher number of parents from rural (50.5%) as compared to urban community (28.5%) consider that slapping/ beating is necessary to maintain discipline,  $p < 0.001$ .

#### 4. Discussion

In the present study, parents reported the need of a child to be protected from sexual (99.5%) and physical abuse (75.5%). All parents identified the possibility of sexual abuse by stranger, while 88.5% identified neighbours, 48.8% reported teachers and a few (11.3%) reported parents. These findings were found to be inconsistent with the actual cases reported by the study of Sharma et al, 2004<sup>[7]</sup> in which out of 117 referred cases, 69% cases were of physical and 30.8% were of sexual abuse, 29.6% cases were of physical violence at the hands of parent/ guardian, while, 3.7% by school teachers and also with the findings of Ige et al, 2011<sup>[8]</sup> in which out of 387 parents, 272 (70.3%) agreed that child sexual abuse was most often perpetrated by familiar adults. But, consistent with the results of Chen et al, 2007<sup>[9]</sup> in which that out of 652 parents more than 50% did not know that children are mostly abused by familiar people. Although, no published literature is available which shows the comparison of the responses between rural and urban community.

The possible reason for these findings could be the reporting of many cases of sexual abuse of children in the last year and also coverage by mass-media made people aware of the possibility of sexual abuse of children. Also, It is a traditional belief that strangers may cause harm.

As per 99.5% parents, commonly girls are victims of sexual abuse. These findings were consistent with the actual cases reported by Sharma et al, 2004<sup>[7]</sup> which reported that girls (77.8%) were more at risk of sexual abuse than boys (22.2%) and with AlMadani et al, 2012<sup>[10]</sup> which reported that most victims of assault were females (56.3%) as compared to males (43.7%).

In practices regarding punishment of children at home in majority of families children are punished mainly by mother (64.8%) than father (56.0%), which is consistent with the result of Gámez-Guadix et al, 2010<sup>[11]</sup> in which corporal punishment was more used by mothers (50.1%) than fathers (42.9%).

Possibility of physical and sexual abuse of children was widely accepted by parents but there was lack of awareness regarding possibility of psychological abuse and neglect. Also, Physical punishment of children was mostly practiced in rural as compared to urban community and was mainly given by mother.

Similar studies can be replicated in different demographic and geographical area with qualitative study design for more in-depth knowledge of the concept related to child care and protection.

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Table 1: Demographic profile of parents

n=400

Variable (s)	Mean+SD	Frequency (%)	
<b>Age</b>			
<25 years	29.8+5.3	95 (23.8)	
>25 years		305 (76.3)	
<b>Gender</b>			
Male		55 (13.8)	
Female		345 (86.3)	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married		387 (96.8)	
Widow/widower/ Divorced/separated		13 (3.3)	
<b>Type of family</b>			
Nuclear family		190 (47.5)	
Joint family		203 (50.8)	
Single parent family		7 (1.8)	
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu		396 (99.0)	
Muslim		4 (1.0)	
<b>Type of house</b>			
Kuccha house		12 (3.0)	
Pucca house		255 (63.8)	
Mixed house		133 (33.3)	
<b>Monthly Family income</b>			
<Rs.5000		136 (34.0)	
Rs.5001-10, 000		145 (36.3)	
>Rs.10, 000		119 (29.8)	
<b>Number of family members</b>			
< 4 members		148 (37.0)	
> 4 members		252 (63.0)	
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate		Self f (%)	Spouse f (%)
<Secondary (upto 10th class)		34 (8.5)	14 (3.5)
>Secondary		222 (55.5)	198 (49.5)
		144 (36.0)	188 (47.0)
<b>Occupation</b>			
Employed		Self f (%)	Spouse f (%)
Unemployed/ Retired		50 (12.5)	275 (68.8)
Business/ agriculture		10 (2.5)	20 (5.0)
Homemaker		15 (3.8)	50 (12.5)
		321 (80.3)	55 (13.8)

(Note: Percentages are in parentheses)

Table 2: Opinion of parents on what constitutes caring

n=400

What constitutes caring?	Place of residence		Total (n <sub>1</sub> +n <sub>2</sub> ) =400	p-value
	Rural n <sub>1</sub> =200 f (%)	Urban n <sub>2</sub> =200 f (%)		
Giving him/her love and affection	192 (96.0)	190 (95.0)	382 (95.5)	0.630 <sup>a</sup>
Fulfilling child's basic needs of food, shelter and clothing	193 (96.5)	198 (99.0)	391 (97.8)	0.175 <sup>b</sup>
Allowing and encouraging child to play and explore	86 (43.0)	111 (55.5)	197 (49.3)	0.012 <sup>a*</sup>
Sending the child to school	183 (91.5)	188 (94.0)	371 (92.8)	0.335 <sup>a</sup>
Keeping a child safe, secure and free from hazards	186 (93.0)	192 (96.0)	378 (94.5)	0.188 <sup>a</sup>
Providing immunization as per age	71 (35.5)	86 (43.0)	157 (39.3)	0.125 <sup>a</sup>
Taking the child to hospital if she/ he is sick	148 (74.0)	144 (72.0)	292 (73.0)	0.652 <sup>a</sup>

a: Chi-square test, b: Fisher's Exact test \*p&lt;0.05

**Table 3:** Opinion of parents on from what a child should be protected

n=400

A child needs protection from what?	Place of residence		Total	p-value
	Rural	Urban	(n <sub>1</sub> +n <sub>2</sub> ) =400	
	n <sub>1</sub> =200	n <sub>2</sub> =200		
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
Anger of parents	89 (44.5)	85 (42.5)	174 (43.5)	0.687 <sup>a</sup>
Domestic Violence	187 (93.5)	195 (97.5)	382 (95.5)	0.089 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Physical</i>	153 (76.5)	149 (74.5)	302 (75.5)	0.642 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Abuse</b> <i>Sexual</i>	200 (100.0)	198 (99.0)	398 (99.5)	0.499 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Psychological</i>	74 (37.0)	110 (55.0)	184 (46.0)	<0.001 <sup>a***</sup>
<i>Neglect</i>	74 (37.0)	122 (61.0)	196 (49.0)	<0.001 <sup>a**</sup>

a: Chi-square test, b: Fisher's Exact test \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 4:** Opinion of parents on what is child abuse

n=400

What is child abuse?	Place of residence		Total	p-value
	Rural	Urban	(n <sub>1</sub> +n <sub>2</sub> ) =400	
	n <sub>1</sub> =200	n <sub>2</sub> =200		
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
Beating with shoe/ slipper/ scale/belt	196 (98.0)	198 (99.0)	394 (98.5)	0.685 <sup>b</sup>
Calling bad names	174 (87.0)	190 (95.0)	364 (91.0)	0.005 <sup>a**</sup>
Withholding love and guidance	83 (41.5)	130 (65.0)	213 (53.3)	<0.001 <sup>a***</sup>
Giving more attention and appreciation to other sibling	38 (19.0)	95 (47.5)	133 (33.3)	<0.001 <sup>a***</sup>
Take away favorite items	82 (41.0)	136 (68.0)	218 (54.5)	<0.001 <sup>a***</sup>
Withholding basic amenities of food, shelter and clothing	157 (78.5)	177 (88.5)	334 (83.5)	0.007 <sup>a**</sup>
Forcing a child into sexual act with self or with others/ Prostitution	178 (89.0)	194 (97.0)	372 (93.0)	0.002 <sup>a**</sup>
Engaging a child in child labour	131 (65.5)	155 (77.5)	286 (71.5)	0.008 <sup>a**</sup>

a: Chi-square test, b: Fisher's Exact test \*\*p <0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 5:** Practices of parents regarding actions of children for which they are punished at home

n=400

Actions of children for which they are punished at home	Place of residence		Total (n <sub>1</sub> +n <sub>2</sub> ) =400	p-value
	Rural	Urban		
	n <sub>1</sub> =200	n <sub>2</sub> =200		
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
Not obeying parents	153 (76.5)	131 (65.5)	284 (71.0)	0.015*
Playing with friends outside home	108 (54.0)	96 (48.0)	204 (51.0)	0.23
Not studying	145 (72.5)	124 (62.0)	269 (67.3)	0.025*
Not doing homework	138 (69.0)	121 (60.5)	259 (64.8)	0.075
Refusal to eat something	86 (43.0)	43 (21.5)	129 (32.3)	<0.001***
Making demands	121 (60.5)	88 (44.0)	209 (52.3)	0.001**
Not doing household work	26 (13.0)	27 (13.5)	53 (13.3)	0.883
Being in the company of peopleparents don't like	145 (72.5)	101 (50.5)	246 (61.5)	<0.001***
Being in the company of friends/other children, parents don't like	139 (69.5)	105 (52.5)	244 (61.0)	<0.001***
Undesirable remarks	77 (38.5)	40 (20.0)	117 (29.3)	<0.001***
Not being responsible	36 (18.0)	10 (5.0)	46 (11.5)	<0.001***
Don't give punishment for anything	46 (23)	68 (34)	114 (28.5)	0.015*

a: Chi-square test \*p &lt;0.05, \*\*p &lt;0.01, \*\*\*p&lt;0.001