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Working Paper No. 2

Some Aspects of Childcare Practices
in Rural Areas of Bangladesh
and Their Implications

Rushidan Islam Rahman*

June 1987

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(i)

CONTENTS

	Pages
I. Introduction	1
II. Basic Considerations Related to Childcare Practices and the Hypotheses Relevant for Rural Bangladesh	2
The importance of breastfeeding	2
The importance of supplementary solid food	3
Clothing and cleanliness	3
Mother's time input and childcare	4
The context of rural Bangladesh and the relevance of the above theoretical considerations	4
III. What Our Children Get? Diet for the Children and Factors Affecting It	10
IV. Time Input in Childcare	23
Problems of estimating childcare from time budget studies	24
Findings on the time input on childcare and the welfare of the child	30
Factors determining the intensity of work	45
Factors determining a mothers childcare time in rural areas	47
Time input in childcare by other members of the family	48
The implications of the variation of mother's childcare time for the welfare of the child	54
Concluding Comments	57
Footnotes	59
References	60

LIST OF TABLES

	Pages
Table 1 : Duration of breastfeeding period for children of two sexes from various landowning groups	12
Table 2 : Duration of breastfeeding period for children of mothers of different educational level	12
Table 3 : Average period of breastfeeding for children of various birth order	13
Table 4 : Average period of breastfeeding for children of mothers of different age.	13
Table 5 : Average age at which a child was given solid food from families with different landownership	16
Table 6 : Average age at which a child is given solid food for mothers of various educational level and age	16
Table 7 : Age at which solid food is given for children with different birth order	18
Table 8 : Type of food first served to the baby (apart from breastfeeding)	18
Table 9 : Number of clothing possessed by children of the two sexes and from various landowning groups	21
Table 10 : Average number of clothing for the child for the mother with various educational level	21
Table 11 : Average number of clothing for the child for the father with various educational level	22
Table 12 : Number of clothing for various ages of the child	22
Table 13 : The situation of cleanliness among children from various landholding groups	25

(iii)

	Pages
Table 14 : Who helps the baby with food	32
Table 15 : Childcare time of the mother from different types of families	34
Table 16 : Relationship of the childcare time of the mother with the child's birth order and sex	34
Table 17 : Childcare time by the mother of different ages	37
Table 18 : Childcare time by the mother for children of various ages of the youngest child	37
Table 19 : Childcare time of the mother with various levels of education	39
Table 20 : Childcare time for mothers who perform various amount of productive work	39
Table 21 : Childcare time for mothers who perform various amount of household work	40
Table 22 : Childcare time for wage worker mother and mothers who are in family employment	40
Table 23 : Magnitude of wage employment and childcare time by the mother	43
Table 24 : Average time spent on childcare by women who work with various intensity	43
Table 25 : Average intensity of work for women who put in various childcare time	44
Table 26 : Amount of productive work and housework performed by women working with various intensity	44
Table 27 : Time input in childcare by members of various relationship	49
Table 28 : Average time spent by other family members on childcare for children with various ages	49

	Pages
Table 29 : Childcare time by other members of the family (except mother) for children of various birth order	50
Table 30 : Time spent by other family members on childcare in different types of families and among landowning groups	50
Table 31 : Time spent by other members of the family in childcare of different age	51
Table 32 : Time spent by the father on childcare in different types of families and among landowning groups	51
Table 33 : Number of times breastfeeding is done by mothers who spend varying time on childcare	52
Table 34 : Amount of time spent on breastfeeding by mothers who spend varying time on childcare	52
Table 35 : Average time spent by mothers on breastfeeding who perform various amount of household work	55
Table 36 : Childcare time and the incidence of disease	56

I. Introduction

A frequently pronounced statement whose full implications are often neglected in Bangladesh is that the future of a nation lies in its children. Otherwise a vast and growing literature on social and economic aspects of village life would not leave the area of childcare practices totally unresearched.

A study of the details of childcare practices in rural areas is important for the following reasons. Firstly, whether they are receiving the type of care that is desirable for a proper growth of their potential. Secondly what are the factors that contribute to the adequacy or inadequacy of proper childcare. This will provide guidelines for future policies. Lastly we need to know who provide the children with the care they require. This has implications for both the quality of childcare and the welfare or burden of the mother.

Recent developments of science and technology and research in medical fields have led to an improved knowledge about the need of children and the impact of various types of food and care on their health and mental development. But such care requires both resources and time input. In rural Bangladesh the majority of the population live in extreme poverty. So it is likely that the resources spent on children will be meagre. Whether enough time is given for their care will depend on the various roles of the mother. But a mere attention to children without investment of actual resources to meet their needs will not be adequate.

A few studies in Bangladesh concentrate on time use by a mother on childcare (Cain 1979, Chowdhury 1982, Khuda 1981). But a neglect of other issues and a simple minded attention to child-care time only, may give misleading results. In this study our objective is to throw some light on the situation of childcare practices in rural areas and consider all of the above three aspects in an integrated way.

II. Basic Considerations Related to Childcare Practices and the Hypotheses Relevant for Rural Bangladesh

In the absence of any other studies and our lack of knowledge about the basic information on this topic of childcare practices, the present study is going largely to be an exploratory one. Here we outline the broad issues relevant for consideration by the social scientists when discussing child care practice. Then we shall put forward some hypothesis and identify areas of investigation which we consider urgent for rural Bangladesh.

The importance of breastfeeding: The developed countries, after they had achieved substantial progress in the invention of various infantmilk formulas for substituting breast milk (BM) are now emphasising the importance of breastmilk and the dangers of the substitutes. Substitutes of breastfeeding gained popularity in the western world because of the fear of the mother about losing her beauty and health. Involvement of women in outside employment necessitated such substitution. But recent emphasis on the usefulness of the traditional

practice of breastfeeding and the sole dependence on breast-milk in the initial months put forward the following arguments. We present them even at the risk of stating the obvious.

BM contains elements that provides resistance against diseases. With BM there is no risk of contamination or infection caused by food or water. No additional equipments are required. It is the cheapest possible food for the baby, only cost being the additional food that should be provided to the lactating mother. The question of measuring the baby's feed each time does not arise.

The importance of supplementary solid food: Though the superiority of breastfeeding cannot be questioned, the baby's requirement after a certain age cannot be satisfied fully without other solid food. It is almost universally agreed that after 5-6 months the baby should be given supplementary solid food to give her full nourishment as well as to grow its habit in taking solid or semi-solid food. It is recommended to give them fruit and fruit juice, egg, combinations of cereal and milk etc. Additional vitamin drops are also recommended.

Clothing and cleanliness: It is essential that the baby and its clothing are kept clean. There is no need to use lots of luxurious and expensive clothing but a minimum number is required if they are to be kept clean and dry.

Mother's time input and childcare: To satisfy the above requirements, the adult members of the family and more importantly the parents and specially the mother need to devote enough time for the care of the children.

It is often argued that the time spent by non-relative baby minders may not be as beneficial as that by mother because of their lower commitment. The argument goes beyond that and associates a lower degree of nutritional adequacy of children with a decline in the amount of time spent on childcare by the mother and its substitution by low commitment relative and non-relative baby minders.

The context of rural Bangladesh and the relevance of the above theoretical considerations.

In the present discussion, the characteristics of rural Bangladesh which are relevant are quite obvious. The widespread poverty has important implications for the availability of resources to be spent on the children. In rural areas more than 80% of the population live below the poverty level (Ahmad and Hossain). The average income is very low. Apart from resources, the knowledge about the child-care practices is not at all given any importance. Literacy among the rural population and among women in particular is very low. (17% and 11% respectively). A reasonable level of education (say above S.S.C. level) which is required to acquaint oneself with the current world and the advances in science and technology is attained by

few. Only 3.6% male and 0.4% female population in rural areas attained S.S.C. or higher level education (BBS 1984). This is closely linked with a lack of perception and knowledge about the modern consumption goods and facilities that may be used for children.

In rural areas a market for modern urban consumer goods has not yet developed. As a result even those with resources cannot get the modern amenities.

In this context it should not be surprising that breastfeeding of children is as natural as that of giving its birth. Artificial milk formula is not available in the nearby shop. Many have not even heard of it. The system of bottle feeding, the process of sterilizing the bottles etc, is neither feasible (because of lack of pure drinking water, scarcity of fuel etc.) nor a familiar proposition. The consciousness of the mother about figure and beauty is irrelevant as the number of births given (or to be given) is uncontrolled and high. Unless the mother has serious health problems, there is no reason of not resorting to breastfeeding. In this context, the concern should be the health and the dietary adequacy of the lactating mother, rather than spending time on propaganda about the need for breastfeeding.

A matter of greater concern would be the lack of knowledge of the rural people about the child's requirements for supplementary food. The fact that breastmilk is not sufficient for a

baby over six months of age may not be known to them. The nutrition content of various food items and their suitability for children is not known to the rural mother (or father). The absence of such food in the child's diet may lead to nutritional inadequacy and stunted growth of children.

In rural areas of Bangladesh (and even in urban areas) the provision of child care facilities on a commercial basis is simply non-existent. It is not required in rural Bangladesh because the mothers do not go to any place where she cannot carry the baby. It is most natural that when she goes to visit someone or even go to some places of entertainment, she carries the baby on her lap and the ones aged above four hold the hand of the mother and walk. The families are often of an extended type and if required the children can be left with other members of the family. Apart from that, the households in a single premise consist of families of the same lineage. So the children of different families play with each other and in case of emergency a mother can rely on her next door neighbour who also has kinship obligations. Thus the considerations that may be important with respect to childcare practices in developed countries are not quite relevant for rural areas of Bangladesh.

Objectives of the study and the hypotheses

The objectives of the present study are modest and we merely wanted to gather some basic idea about how children grow in rural areas of Bangladesh. In this endeavour we use

data collected through interviewing of mothers in a village in the district of Tangail. Some details of the characteristics of the village and notes on data are contained in the next section. We use this data to probe into the following questions:

1) How universal is the breastfeeding practice, what is the length of breastfeeding period and what are the factors affecting this length.

2) The pattern of provision of supplementary food and the socio-cultural factors affecting this pattern. Here we shall try to identify what type of food is provided to the infants.

3) To assess the health situation of the children we shall examine the incidence of disease among them and whether there is any difference between children from various socioeconomic groups.

We shall also examine how far the requirement of clothing of these children is satisfied.

5) Apart from what children get, it is important to know who provides them with daily care and how to division of labour works in a family in this respect. A description of the daily care that goes to a baby will illuminate the difference in the pattern of childcare in rural areas and in developed urban areas. In this analysis we shall try to see what is the implication of such time input and childcare practices for the usual time budget studies which try to account for the mother's

time use for child care. How the mother copes with the daily household work and productive activities along with the responsibility of childcare may seem to be a puzzle and an attempt is made to resolve it.

Notes on data and characteristics of the village surveyed.

This study tries to capture the basic features of childcare practices in Bangladesh which are expected to be universal over the whole country. So we confined our sample for data collection to one village with typical agro-ecological characteristics. Childcare practices are not expected to show much variation with regional or ecological variation (apart from the tribal population). In selecting the village we avoided the special circumstances which might affect the normal life and childcare practices of the people, e.g., nearness to any big city or being in the danger of river bank erosion etc. We selected the Mirzapur upazila (police station) of Tangail district. The upazila headquarter is about 43 miles away from Dhaka city. Though the upazila headquarter is just beside the Dhaka-Tangail highway, the village we selected (Nardana), is more difficult to reach as it is around four miles to the interior and is connected with the highway by a mud road. In the dry season rickshaws ply along this road; but during the monsoons it is difficult to go by a rickshaw and a small canal has to be crossed by boat to reach the village. This canal flows along two sides of the village.

A total of around 210 households live in the village. Among them we found 141 households to have children below five years' age. Since we wanted a sample size around this number, we included all these households in our sample. We interviewed the mother of the child in each household through a structured questionnaire to obtain information on childcare practices and the time budget of the mother and other relevant issues. We also conducted extensive informal discussions to learn the rationale of the prevailing practices and about the attitude of the mother about their childcare activities.

Now we present some general information about the village. The upazila in which this village is situated gets an average rainfall of 81". Seventy five percent households depend on agriculture. But the per household availability of agricultural land is small. Average landownership of each household is 0.67 hectares. The distribution of land is very skewed. 46% households are landless and marginal owners and 22% owners at the top own 70% of all land. The cropping pattern is predominated by paddy which covers 80% of cropped acreage. The cropping intensity is 150.

There is one high school in the village. Within the village there is one weekly market (haat) which operates fully twice a week. There is no branch of any commercial bank in the village. The village does not receive electric supply; nor is there any possibility that it will do so in near future.

The infrastructural facilities and the social and economic characteristics of the village describe a typical village in Bangladesh which is yet to receive the thrust of modernisation and development.

III. What Our Children Get? Diet for the Children and Factors Affecting It.

In the village, out of a total of 141 mothers of different ages, we could not find anyone who did not resort to breastfeeding for a short or longer period of time. This universality of the phenomenon means that there is no need to convince our rural women about the importance and advantages of breastfeeding. Our observation is that women resort to it for a rather long period. Enquiring only those cases who had stopped giving breastfeed, we found that they continued to give breastfeeding for 36 months on the average¹. The variation of breastfeed months among the women are rather small which means that the duration of breastfeeding is really long.

Now we see whether the duration of breastfeeding has any systematic relationship with the socio-economic characteristics of the mother and the household. We choose land-ownership as an important variable as it is a symbol of economic strength and social status. Landownership is usually highly correlated to a household's total income. The other important variable whose influence we would like to observe is the education of the mother. Education is likely to be associated with a greater

consciousness and familiarity with modern ideas of childcare. We also examine whether a large number of children means a deterioration in the health of the mother and a reduced period of breastfeeding. Recent concern about the sexwise discrimination in the intra-household allocation of consumption benefits has led to various empirical verifications of the phenomenon (Chen; Huq and D'Souza 1981). We would like to see how far such discrimination is true for breastfeeding practices and other foods given to infants.

In Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 we present these information. From Table 2 we find that landownership does not have any systematic relationship with the period of breastfeeding. Similarly there is no systematic pattern of relation, with either the age of the mother or her education or the birth order of the child. For male and female babies the period is surprisingly similar. Thus the period seems to be more or less unaffected by these external factors. It is a traditional norm to continue to feed the baby as long as possible.

In this respect we should mention another point about this length of breastfeeding. The population in the village is entirely Muslim. And according to the religious practice, a baby should be breastfeed for not more than two years. In reality the period extends in many cases upto three years. In rural areas we expect women to follow the rulings of the religion. Such deviation occurs because many women are not

Table 1

Duration of breastfeeding period for children of two sexes from various landowning groups

Land ownership (in decimals)	Average duration of breastfed period (months)		
	Male Child	Female Child	All
0 - 50	34.0 (9)	32.18 (11)	33.0 (20)
51 - 100	46.5 (4)	43.20 (5)	44.67 (9)
101-200	31.5 (4)	34.50 (4)	33.00 (8)
201-500	24.0 (1)	39.00 (2)	34.00 (3)
All groups	35.67 (18)	35.73 (22)	35.70 (40)

Table 2

Duration of breastfeeding period for children of mothers of different educational level

Level of Education	Average period (months). of breastfeeding	Number of cases
Illiterate	36.48	25
Below primary	32.40	5
Class V-VII	35.14	7
Class VIII to H.S.C.	36.00	3
All	35.70	40

Table 3

Average period of breastfeeding for children
of various birth order

Birth order	Average months for which breastfed	Number of cases
1 - 2	35.57	14
3 - 5	32.73	11
5 - 8	31.80	10
8+	38.40	5

Table 4

Average period of breastfeeding for
children of mothers of different age

Age of the mother	Average period (months) of breastfeeding	Number of cases
15 - 20	37.20	5
21 - 30	34.55	29
31 - 40	40.00	6

aware of this rule. Moreover, when talking intimately, they expressed the sentiment that they are not able to give anything nice or attractive to their children. So their affection tells them not to withdraw this Godgiven gift from the baby. Thus the concern about rural children is not to induce mothers to give breastfeeding but should be about the provision of other food to children.

One general feature in the village is that none of the children were bottlefeed. Currently none of them are served with powdered milk or any other baby food in cans. The rural mothers and the population in general are not aware of these processed baby food (except milk powder). When breastmilk seem to be insufficient, the mother starts weaning by giving soft cereal food specially cooked for the baby. It is usually done with whole or powdered rice (Table 8). The children are gradually habituated to the rice and 'ruti' that are cooked for the family.

But this process starts quite late for the rural habit. The average age at which they are given food other than breastmilk is 9.6 months. This is twice the age recommended for starting weaning a baby. Since this is a significant deviation from the norm suggested by medical scientists, we should investigate the factors which are responsible for this. We examine the variation of this age (of giving other food) with some socio-economic and cultural factors. The important ones

are; landownership, birth order and sex of the baby, age and education of the mother.

This age is not systematically related to the landholding of the family (Table 5) which can be interpreted to mean that it is not the lack of economic means to buy substitute food for the baby that delays the weaning process. Birth order of the baby and age of the mother can be interpreted to represent the experience of the mother with respect to baby's requirement. But the dietary practices for the baby does not vary with these factors (Table 6 & 7). Even a large variation in formal education, starting from primary to H.S.C. level does not change these pattern. This means that formal schooling does not educate the girls about the childcare practices and nutrition requirement of babies. Any discrimination between children of the two sexes was not revealed by our data (Table 5).

Next we look at some indicators of food intake by the children. It was beyond the scope of the present study to collect data on the quantity of each items consumed and their calorie content. But we have some indicators to judge the situation. We have descriptions of items consumed by each baby during the last 24 hours before the survey. We find that mostly cereal food like rice, ruti (made of brown flour) etc are given to the children. Fish and meat is absent from the diet equally for all children from various landholding groups. So it is not due to a lack of access to resources to buy the food

Table 5

Average age at which a child was given solid food
from families with different landownership

Land ownership	Age (months)	Female child	All
00 - .50	8.00(23)	9.67(24)	8.85(47)
.51 - 100	10.26(19)	10.46(13)	10.34(32)
101- 200	9.80(15)	9.75(20)	9.77(35)
200- 300	10.17(6)	9.33(3)	9.89(9)
301- 500	11.00(3)	11.33(3)	11.17(6)
All groups	9.39(66)	9.92(63)	9.65(129)

Table 6

Average age at which a child is given solid food for
mothers of various educational level and age

Educational level of the mother	Age of giving solid food	Number of cases
Illiterate	9.66	85
Below Primary	9.55	22
Class VI-VII	9.60	15
Class VIII-X	9.67	6
S.S.C./H.S.C.	12.00	1
Age of the mother		
15 - 20	9.79	14
21 - 30	9.51	84
31 - 40	10.00	29
41 - 50	9.50	2

but due to a mere ignorance that these are essential for the children. Similarly no children get eggs in their meal. We specifically probed whether this happened only for the previous day or is the usual pattern. To our query whether the child was given any egg during the last one week, in most cases it was a negative response. Only protein food contained regularly in their diet is lentils either provided separately or cooked with rice. Only a small number of them had vegetables, fish and/or meat in the diet.

Thus it appears that the dietary practices for children in rural areas are not determined by his/her need or the access to resources to meet the needs. The pattern is similar for mother from all socio-economic groups. Since our hypothesised factors do not help to explain the pattern of weaning (starting food other than breastmilk) or the type of food given to children, we probed deeper into the matter. Our observation in the field and informal interviews with the parents reveal that the following forces are operating. Parents follow the accepted traditional norms about the food that should be given to children. Apart from that, there is an usual emphasis on the food requirement of the working age adult persons and this emphasis combined with a lack of knowledge about nutritional requirement of children for their proper growth leads to a neglect of their case.

Table 7

Age at which solid food is given for children
with different birth order

Birth order	Age at which solid food was given (months)	Number of cases
1 - 2	9.28	43
3 - 4	9.82	38
5 - 8	9.47	38
8 +	11.30	10

Table 8

Type of food first served to the baby
(apart from breastfeeding)

Land ownership	'Jan' made with brown floor(ata)	'Jan' made with powdered rice	Rice and similar preparation	Ruti	Halua	Others	
0 - .50	10	3	25	8	2	4	3
.51 - 1.00	3	2	11	2	1	7	-
1.01 - 2.00	1	4	16	-	4	8	2
2.01 - 5.00		1	7	-	1	5	1

Parents reported that they follow the accepted traditional norms about the food that should be given to children. These norms are set on the belief that some items are easily digestible than others and these are suitable for the child while other 'generate heat' and the children cannot digest these. The first group contains the cereal foods like rice or gruel made with powdered rice, thin lenti' soup etc. The items that are believed to be difficult to digest are egg, meat etc. Our observation is that in rural areas the cereal and lentil is cooked plain without spices and is suitable for infants. On the contrary fish and meat are most often cooked with lots of spices and made very hot with chilli powder which is obviously not suitable for the babies. In rural areas, it is beyond the usual practice to cook separately for the baby a fish or meat dish which is soft and not spicy. This is also due to the fact that most mothers of small babies are already overburdened with the pressure of household and productive work (we shall discuss this in the next chapter) and the system of hearth and fuel used makes it difficult and time consuming to cook even a simple dish.

Apart from these beliefs and constraints, the notion of requirements prevailing among the rural parents is also responsible for this deprivation of the children. They are not aware of the requirement of balanced diet for the children and the importance of protein food for their proper growth. On the other hand, the food requirement of adult working males is

always given greater importance compared to other groups in the family. All these factors ultimately lead to a lack of balanced food for the weaning infants.

Clothing and Cleanliness

The number of pieces of clothing possessed by rural children are surprisingly small. On the average, the rural mothers are satisfied with 4.11 pieces of clothes for children under five.

As with respect to food, in terms of clothing also, we do not find any sex-wise discrimination or injustice. But unlike the similarity of dietary pattern, along the landholding groups, the number of clothing increases for children of large landowners (Table 9) The average number of clothing of children show a rise with the increase in the level of education of the parents (Table 10 and 11). Level of education seems to influence the parents desire about clothing more than the influence of landownership. Thus, when the mother is educated above class eight, or the father goes above S.S.C., the number of clothing for children shows a quite visible increases.

Table 12 shows that the age of the child does not have any systematic relationship with possession of clothing. Thus it is not the actual need of the child but the desire of the parents and their ability to buy it (prompted by their background of education, land ownership etc.) are the factors working behind the number of clothing possessed by a child.

Table 9

Number of clothing possessed by children of the two sexes and from various landowning groups

Land ownership (decimals)	Number of clothing		
	Male child	Female child	Both sexes
0	2.96 (24)	3.56 (27)	3.27 (51)
51 - 100	4.43 (21)	4.44 (16)	4.43 (37)
101 - 200	4.40 (15)	4.55 (20)	4.49 (35)
201 - 300	5.00 (7)	6.00 (3)	5.30 (10)
301 - 600	5.75 (4)	4.00 (4)	4.87 (8)
All groups	4.06 (71)	4.17 (70)	4.11 (141)

Table 10

Average number of clothing for the child for the mother with various educational level

Level of Education of the mother	Average Number of clothing	Number of cases
Illiterate	3.82	95
Below primary	4.30	23
Class V to VII	4.81	16
Class VIII-X	5.67	6
S.S.C./H.S.C.	7.00	1
All groups	4.11	141

Table 11

Average number of clothing for the child
for the father with various educational level

Level of Education of the father	Average Number of clothing	Number of cases
Illiterate	3.57	49
Below primary	3.72	25
Class V to VII	4.00	18
Class VIII to X	4.17	23
S.S.C./H.S.C.	5.22	18
B.A.+	8.25	8

Table 12

Number of clothing for various ages of the child

Age of the child (in months)	Average number of clothing
1 - 6	3.92 (12)
7 - 12	5.00 (14)
13 - 24	3.97 (38)
25 - 36	3.85 (48)
37 - 60	4.38 (29)

Since it is not only the clothing but also the cleanliness, which matters for the health of the child, we tried to examine the situation of the clothing in this respect. But in most cases the babies were in clean clothes. Since the reporting on this question was based on the interviewer's actual observation, the women might have become careful after the first few interviews and kept the children clean. But an examination of the hair and fingernails for cleanliness reveal that in 40% cases, they were unclean. In fact the number of clothing possessed by children is so low that we cannot expect them to be clean. Moreover these women mentioned that they wash these cloths after 6.45 days on the average. So the fact that 75% of children showed clean clothes, may be an overestimate.

IV. Time Input in Childcare

Human babies are the most helpless creatures in the world who cannot fulfil their own need by themselves during the first few years of life. So time input by adult members is as important for the baby as are other physical resources². The child has to be helped with food, with its clothes, in washing, cleaning and in making it sleep.

That is why the research on time use of women has focussed on the time spent on childcare as a major determinant of women's time use pattern (Mueller 1982). Most of these research are based on time budget studies which account for a woman's time allocation during the last 24 hours³. In our subsequent

discussion, we shall start with a review of the appropriateness of time budget studies for estimating childcare time. We suggest some modifications of the methodology and use that methodology to examine the time input on childcare by a mother. We also examine the factors influencing the amount of time spent on childcare by different members of the family.

Problems of estimating childcare from time budget studies

The problems may arise both from the subjective judgement of the respondent and the interviewer and also from problems associated with objective measurement.

Subjective judgement enters in a subtle way. Childcare is conceived by women in a rural society of Bangladesh as their very natural role for which not special credit belongs to them. That they are performing this duty does not relieve them from other heavy household work or productive activity. Child care is such an activity that often it does not require a physical effort but only watching them against various hazards. Often it can be performed simultaneously with other household work or directly productive activities. This gives the mother a feeling that it is not an important activity to report. In rural areas of Bangladesh, breastfeeding of children is so natural and universal that the mother is not even aware how many times or how long the baby is sucking. All these lead to underreporting the number of times she comes back to the work of child care and the amount of time spent on such activity.

Table 13

The situation of cleanliness among children
from various landholding groups

Landownership (acres)	Number of children in terms of			
	Cleanliness of clothing		Cleanliness of hair and fingernaib	
	Clean	Unclean	Clean	Unclean
00 - .50	29	20	25	27
.51 - 1.00	31	5	18	17
1.01 - 2.00	31	4	24	11
2.01 - 3.00	9	2	11	-
3.01 - 5.00	8	-	6	2

The same set of reasons will make the interviewer tired of mentioning it so often throughout the day.

The objective difficulties of measuring time input in childcare arise from the following sources. Many studies enumerate the events during day time, which is assumed to consist of fourteen hours (from getting up to going to bed at night). But the mother of a child under two may often have to wake up at night to change the wet cloths of the baby or to give him/her a feed. This is more troublesome than the work done at daytime but goes unnoticed. In fact in rural areas of Bangladesh the practice is that the child sleeps on the mothers arms and this gives him warmth and security, which are not less important parts of childcare and goes without measurement. Even if observation is spread formally over the 24 hours, the reporting or interviewing stops when the respondent goes to bed. Enumeration of activities over 14 hours or only upto going to bed is sufficient to get time allocation for productive activities or housework, but is inadequate for estimating childcare. In fact the focus of most time budget studies is productive activity and the analysis of childcare follows only as a residual category. The work of childcare is interrupted by various other responsibilities and every time the mother comes back to the child may not be reported.

The most important problem in this respect arises from the simultaneous involvement of women in a variety of activities. Childcare is most often performed along with other housework

or productive activity. The common picture in rural areas is that of a woman drying paddy or cooking with a child on the lap. When heavier work of paddy husking or washing etc. are done, the child is laid down on the yard and the mother has to keep constant watch. A child having solid food is served along with other members or while the mother is eating, but the child has to be helped with the food. In such cases, the care of the baby is often viewed as of secondary importance and the time is listed under the other activity. At best the time may be divided among the activities in various proportions. But we cannot deny the fact that whole of the time while the child is on the lap, or sucking the mother or being helped with food is required for that and the entire period should be counted as childcare. The problem of doing this is that, the total time on all work will exceed 24 hours. We shall come back to this question on our suggestion of an appropriate method. But the solution of omitting or dividing the childcare time may simplify the calculation but surely distorts the picture.

This problem becomes more serious when comparison of childcare time is made for two groups of women. The extent of being engaged in multiple work simultaneously may vary for the groups. Such variation will result from the overall pressure of work. When women participate in productive activities, either within the household or paid work for other, their domestic responsibilities of childcare or cooking has also to be dispensed and they cope with the tasks by doing two things together. In such

cases it is very likely that working women combine work to a greater extent than others. So time budget data on childcare, which simplifies by allocating time to single work cannot be used for comparison between working and non-working groups.

To give a realistic picture of childcare provided by the mother, time budget studies can help if they are modified to some extent. Along with suggestion of these modifications we should think of supplementing the findings of time budget studies with other information. We put forward the following suggestions which we tried to make use of in the present survey.

Firstly, time budget studies should effectively cover the entire 24 hour period without making any a priori assumption about a minimum time for sleep and/or rest. The interviewer should specifically probe into the fact whether mothers have to wake up at night and take care of the children.

To list all the events under childcare and as many times as it occurred, there should be a checklist of events to see which of them are done and for how long. This is necessary because apart from recall lapse, the mother may think that these are unimportant, and the interviewer may be unexperienced about childcare work. Of course, such detailed listing requires that special emphasis is given on the query about childcare. In fact it may have to be in the form of a separate questionnaire asking whether the mother performed each tasks of childcare, how many times a day and how long it took each time. It

should be asked whether at night the child sleeps on the same bed as mother, whether the mother cooks separate solid food for the child (not a part of usual cooking) etc. These will supplement the usual time budget study.

The biggest problem to solve is the question of simultaneous involvement in childcare and other activities. In such the allocation of that time according to the importance of the activities will lead to gross underestimation of childcare time. We suggest that the whole period of time is entered under both headings. This will surely result in the total time to exceed 24 hours. But once we know that there is overlapping events it should not be confusing. We can express the time allocated to each activity as percentage of the total 24 hour time, keeping in mind that the percentage will not add up to 100 but will give us an idea about the demand of each activity on total time. We can also make comparison between time devoted to various activities.

In addition, this type of double counting may be used to calculate some index of intensity of time use. The total time (hours) obtained from addition of all multiple entries may be divided by 24 to obtain this index. It may be useful to compare this index among various socio-economic groups.

The above modifications in methodology will help to remove the misconception about the ease with which a child is brought up as reflected in the existing time budget studies showing a

small amount of time devoted to childcare. We feel that it is urgent to conduct such studies to reflect the real effort of mothers on childcare in terms of the amount of time spent and in the different types of care provided.

Findings on the time input on childcare and the welfare of the child:

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, where there is no institutional facility of childcare, the task remains in the hands of the family. The usual genderwise division of labour attributes most of the task to the mother. In the absence of toys and modern equipments like playpen, pushchair etc. for the baby, the mother has to keep constant watch on the baby and we enumerate a prolonged period of childcare time by the mother. In this situation is it appropriate to conceive of a directly proportional increase in child's welfare with an increase in time input by the mother?

When children are left with baby minders, a doubt often arises about their commitment of the child's welfare. This argument is often extended to argue that (Chowdhury 1981) other mother substitutes (e.g. elder sister, grandmother etc) may not also be as efficient as the mother.

But before such an extension can be justified, and we look for a relationship between mother's childcare time and child's dietary adequacy or other performance we should go deeper and examine the basic differences in childcare practices in rural Bangladesh and their implications for the above question.

A reduced time input of the mother may impose negative influences on the baby either because of psychological deprivation or because of lack of interest or time spent in giving her food or daily care like changing clothes, washing, cleaning etc. In rural areas, other relatives work as mother substitute and have a blood relationship with the child and also the mother is usually present nearby, doing some other types of work. So the question of psychological deprivation does not arise. Similarly a baby's clothings are not changed often, because she does not possess too many of them. Feeding of the baby is usually the mother's responsibility. During the first ten months the baby relies entirely on breastfeeding. So as long as the mother devotes the time for feeding, the question of nutritional inadequacy will not arise. Similarly children taking solid food, usually share the same food as the adult members. So, whether children receive a balanced diet will not depend on total childcare time.

We also found that even if other members help the mother in childcare, feeding of the baby is usually the mothers responsibility. In 75% cases mother alone is responsible for feeding the baby. In other cases she shares it with her husband or other adult female members of the family (Table 14).

Thus ultimately it comes to the simple fact that the mother has to spend the whole day looking after the baby as long as it is not asleep. At the same time she has to perform other essential productive and household work. So either she

Table 14

Who helps the baby with food

Person who helps	No. of cases	Percentage of cases
Only mother	106	74.65
Both parents	4	2.82
Mother and/or elder sister	18	12.68
Mother, Grandmother	9	6.34
Grandmother	1	-

has to take on herself the strain of doing two works simultaneously or if lucky, she can rely on some other members of the household to watch the baby, play with it and perform some of the duties. Thus the longer time input by the mother is not synonymous with increased welfare of the child. Rather it means an increased strain on the mother. Beyond a point, such increase in time input by the mother may mean a lower satisfaction of child's psychological and physical needs as the mother is tired and it might be better for the child if the duty could be shifted to others.

In this background we now look at the details of time input in childcare by the mother and other members of the family. We should mention that in our time budget methodology of data collection, we tried to adopt the modifications suggested in the earlier section. Our observation in the field suggest that childcare is an activity which is so natural for rural women and has grown as the habit of the women that they easily combine this with other activities. So women devote a very small amount of time as childcare only and most of the childcare time is also devoted to housework or productive work as well. We did not divide up the time to these joint activities but enumerated the whole of it as childcare and again all of it to other categories and computed intensity of work as we mentioned earlier.

Table 15

Childcare time of the mother from different types of families

Family Type	Childcare time (minutes) by	
	Mother	Other members
Nuclear	535.3 (110)	146.60 (108)
Joint and Extended	423.0 (133)	245.6 (139)
All	515.9 (133)	168.7 (139)

Table 16

Relationship of the childcare time of the mother with the child's birth order and sex

Birth order of child	Time spent by the mother for		
	Male baby	Female baby	Both sex
1 - 2	949 (25)	541 (20)	515 (45)
3 - 4	544 (17)	504 (20)	522 (37)
5 - 8	526 (25)	502 (18)	516 (43)
9 and above	245 (2)	568 (6)	487 (8)
All groups	511 (69)	521 (64)	516 (133)

The total time enumerated in this way is quite high and reflects the fact that a child cannot really be left alone and has to be watched all the day. On an average a mother spends 8.6 hours on childcare. Out of this more than seven hours are spent as joint work. So the usual procedure of dividing it up equally or according to importance would reduce the childcare time to half or one third. That is why other studies (Chowdhury 1982). Farouk(1980), Khuda (1981) come up with surprisingly low figures of childcare time.

While analysing the influence of various factors on mothers childcare time we shall use the total time (irrespective of joint work) on childcare.

First of all one obvious comparison can be made among mothers from nuclear families and from joint or extended families. It is usually expected that in the latter type of families the adult members jointly bear the workload of the family. More than one adult woman is likely to be present. All housework and childcare responsibilities are shared by them. When two women have small children they can be looked after by one of the mothers while the other can engage in housework or other activities. It is observed that the presence of the mother-in-law gives a relief to the mother as most of the paytime of the child is spent with the grandmother. Data shows that the childcare time of the mother is substantially lower in the joint and extended families (Table 15).

In our earlier discussion, we found no evidence of gender-wise discrimination against female babies in terms of provision of food and clothing. Here we find that the time spent on her care is no less than male babies (it is slightly higher for female babies) (Table 16).

There is likelihood that the age of the mother and the number of children born to her may influence the experience and enthusiasm of the mother about the care of children. Such influence is likely to reduce the childcare time with an increase in age and number^{of} births as they will make the mother more experienced and less enthusiastic. Tables 16 and 17 shows that such a tendency is not visible in the actual practice. The reason is that whatever be the attitude of the mother, she has to do the minimum look after of the child. We found that many of the women expressed the opinion that they are tired of having to look after the child. Still she spends a large amount of time on this job means that she does not really have a choice.

The childcare time of the mother shows a slight increase with the age of the child which reflects the fact that as the children grow up, they make the mother more busy (Table 18).

Education of the mother does not contribute to any systematic variation of childcare time (Table 19).

Table 17

Childcare time by the mother of different ages

Age of the mother (year)	Childcare time
10 - 20	597.5 (14)
21 - 30	499.4 (87)
31 and above	524.8 (32)
All groups	515.9 (133)

Table 18

Childcare time by the mother for children of various ages of the youngest child

Age of the child (month)	Childcare time
1 - 6	480.8 (12)
7 - 12	459.3 (14)
13 - 24	534.9 (35)
25 - 36	514.6 (43)
37 - 60	536.6 (29)
All groups	515.9

The more substantial debate about mother's childcare time concentrates on the contradictions in her role in productive employment and her responsibilities as a mother. It is often hypothesized that a mother who is involved substantially in productive activity, spends less time in childcare. We had argued elsewhere (Rahman 1985) that much of the empirical support results from the non-accounting of childcare as a joint activity and when dividing up the time used in two activities jointly, more emphasis is put on the productive work and a larger amount of time is attached to that. In the earlier section, we elaborated on the reasons as to why this contradiction in roles is unlikely to exist in rural areas of Bangladesh. Our data confirms this and shows that there is no systematic variation of childcare time with the variation in either productive work (Table 20) or household work (Table 21).

Those who perform wage work and are employed by other households may be seen as a separate group who do not have control over their own time use. Wage employment takes them away from their own household and if they have to leave their children behind, the childcare time may be substantially reduced. But the wage employment market for women in rural areas of Bangladesh is very different from formal industrial wage employment. In the villages in general and in this village also, the employers and the employee women enter into some informal personalised relationship arising either from kinship

Table 19

Childcare time of the mother with various levels
of education

Level of Education	Childcare time
Illiterate	518.0(94)
Below primary	516.3(19)
Class V to VII	527.7(13)
Class VIII to X	481.7(6)
S.S.C. & H.S.C.	360.0(1)
All	515.8(133)

Table 20

Childcare time for mothers who perform various
amount of productive work

Time spent on productive work (minutes)	Average amount of time spent on childcare (minutes)
0 - 60	442 (6)*
61 - 180	499 (24)
181 - 240	550 (16)
241 - 300	446 (21)
301 - 360	53 (20)
361 and above	555 (46)
All groups	516 (133)

*Figures in the parenthesis give the number of cases

Table 21

Childcare time for mothers who perform various amount of household work

Time spent on housework (minutes)	Time spent on childcare (minutes)
00 - 60	442 (9)
61 - 180	515 (24)
181 - 240	562 (19)
241 - 300	486 (26)
301 - 360	501 (29)
361 and above	554 (26)

Table 22

Childcare time for wage worker mother and mothers who are in family employment

Group	Number of cases	Average time (minutes) given to childcare
Wage working mother	20	543
Mothers who are not involved in wage work	113	511

relation or from long acquaintance as co-villager and/or a long period of association as employers and employees (Rahman 1986). Such informal nature of the relationship makes it possible for the wage working women to carry their babies to the employers house. Since they are employed mostly within the homestead, they can watch the child and work simultaneously. In 75% of the cases, the wage worker women carried their babies to the employers house.

This has an opposite impact on childcare time as contrasted to the conventional belief. In the employers house the mother alone is responsible for looking after the child whereas if she was in her own house, she could rely on their members of the family for some time. Thus when the child accompanies the mother to the employers house, the childcare time of the mother is even longer.

Our data (Table 22) shows that the wage working women spend a slightly longer time per day on childcare than those who are not involved in wage work. Though the difference is small, we are at least satisfied that the wage employment do not reduce the childcare time of the mothers in the rural areas. Moreover we find that childcare time increases for women who spend longer time on wage work (Table 23).

Since all these are made possible by performing childcare jointly with the other work, we should devote some attention to the question of joint work.

In our data we find that most childcare was performed as joint activity. We do not have any concrete ways of assessing the effectiveness of childcare as joint work compared to performed as independent activity. We do not have any reason to suspect that this will be less beneficial for the child. However for the mother, the joint activity is likely to be strenuous but it will enable her to devote more time to each category of activity.

The average intensity of work⁴ among the mothers was 1.32 while we would expect that those who do not have a child would be working at an intensity near one.

It is obvious that the more time one puts to childcare, the greater will be the intensity of work, to put it the other way round, as the intensity of work goes up, we find a sharp increase in childcare time (Tables 24 and 25). On the other hand, the time spent on productive work and household work does not show such sharp and systematic increase with intensity of work. Productive work shows a positive relationship with intensity of work (Table 26) with an exception of one group (that of lowest intensity of work). But the rise of time spent on productive activity is less sharp in comparison to the

Table 23

Magnitude of Wage Employment and Childcare time by the
Mother

Time devoted (minutes) to childcare by wage working mothers	Average time spent on wage work (minutes)
01 - 360	193 (3)
361 - 540	455 (4)
541 - 600	582 (4)
601 and above	681 (9)
All wage working mothers	543 (20)

Table 24

Average Time Spent on Childcare by Women who
Work with various Intensity

Intensity of Work	Time (minutes) spent on childcare
1.00 - 1.10	188 (12)
1.11 - 1.25	372 (22)
1.26 - 1.40	535 (67)
1.41 and above	698 (67)
All women	516 (133)

Table 25

Average Intensity of Work for Women who put
in Various Childcare time

Childcare time (minutes)	Average intensity of (work)
1 - 240	1.04 (10)
241 - 360	1.17 (10)
361 - 480	1.27 (29)
481 - 540	1.32 (23)
541 - 600	1.38 (18)
601 and above	1.45 (43)
All groups	1.32 (133)

Table 26

Amount of Productive Work and Housework Per-
formed by Women Working with Various Intensity

Intensity of work	Time (minutes) spent on productive work	Time (minutes) spent on housework
1.00 - 1.10	366 (10)	213 (11)
1.11 - 1.25	278 (22)	295 (22)
1.26 - 1.40	298 (66)	302 (67)
1.41 and above	398 (31)	276 (30)
All women	324 (129)	287 (130)

relation between time spent on childcare and the intensity of work (Table 25). All these imply that housework is fixed by a variety of factors and is not needed to be extended even if it is possible by intensifying work effort. On the contrary, productive work and especially childcare can be expanded by raising the intensity of work.

Factors determining the intensity of work

Since intensity of work of a woman is very crucial for her welfare, we shall go deeper into an analysis of the factors affecting this intensity. We have already seen the role of the three types of activities (namely: household work, productive work and childcare work) on the intensity of work. Here we make a regression analysis where along with these variables, we enter various other characteristics as explanatory variables. The results are given below as equation 1.

We find that age of mother, amount of land owned by the household, number of adult females in the household and the amount of housework done by the woman does not have any significant influence on intensity of work. This may be due to the fact that all the members share the workload. Dummy variable for family type, which assumes the value of one for nuclear family and zero for joint or extended families has a significant positive influence which means that women from nuclear families work more intensively. Amount of productive work done by a woman makes significant positive influence on her

intensity of work and similar is the role of the age of the youngest child. But the most dramatic impact is made by the amount of time spent on childcare. It is significant at very high degree of probability (almost certainty). This model explains 96 per cent of total variation of intensity of work and childcare time contributes 73 per cent of this. The remaining variables explain 23 per cent variation.

This implies that a rural woman with a little child is busy all day with her child. When other work falls on her, she raises the intensity of work.

Equation 1: Factors Influencing the 'intensity of work' of a rural mother

Dependent variable : Intensity of work.

Explanatory variables	Value of the coefficient	Value of 'F'	Change in R-square
Age of the mother	0.795E-04	0.04	.001
Age of the child	0.747E-03	15.37	.063
Land owned by the household	-0.243E-04	1.10	.038
Size of the family	-0.139E-03	4.05	.001
Family type (dummy)	0.983E-02	2.27	.054
Amount of housework done by the women	0.342E-04	1.92	.013
Amount of productive work done by her	0.502E-04	5.52	.064
Amount of childcare work done by her	0.707E-03	2467.70	.730
Constant	0.911		

Factors determining a mothers childcare time in rural areas

Here we give a regression analysis to analyse the factors affecting a mothers childcare time. Equation 2 summaries the findings. In our earlier analysis and the observations given in table 16 we found that the sex of the child as birth order are not relevant for the mother's childcare time. Our regression analysis confirms this. Age of the child has strongly significant negative influence on such time. Family size has significant positive influence. One variable which did not give significant coefficient according to our expectation based on earlier analyses is the 'family type (dummy)'. Most dramatically significant influence is exerted by the intensity of work by the mother. The influence of landownership of the household is not significant.

Equation 2: Factors influencing the amount of time spent on childcare by a mother

Dependent variable: time spent on childcare (minutes) by the mother during last 24 hours.

		of 'F'	R-square
Age of the child (in months)	-1.104	18.42	.016
Family type dummy (Nuclear = 1, other = 0)	-2.963	0.09	.063
Total adult in the family	5.451	1.17	.000
Birth order of the child	-1.765	1.68	.002
Sex of the child	-7.524	1.09	.002
Intensity of work by the mother	1335.556	2664.37	.876
Land owned by the family	0.026	0.65	.000
Size of the family	0.164	3.00	.001
R-square = .961			
N = 131			

Time Input in Childcare by other Members of the Family

In rural areas the mother is mainly responsible for the care of the child. This is also revealed by a comparison of the time input by the mother and other members of the family. While on the average the mothers spend 8.6 hours a day other members give 2.8 hours a day. Table 27 gives a picture of the importance of the contribution by other members in the care of the child. While the father does not spend much time, in most families they contribute to childcare. Grandparents spend three hours a day, but they are variable in only 20% of the sample. Elder sisters contribute less time but are relevant for one third of the cases.

In Tables 29 to 32 we present some breakdown to explore the influence of possible variables on the childcare time of other members. It is obvious that in joint and extended families other members are more easily available and they spend larger amount of time than in nuclear families (Table 30). For both types of families we compare across landownership groups. In the larger ownership groups, contribution of other members is greater (Table 30). Time spent by other members decline with the age of child (Table 31). The reverse is true for the birth order (Table 29), this is readily explained by the fact that for children of higher birth order, the possibility of care from older sisters is greater.

Table 27

Time input in Childcare by Members of Various Relationship

Relation	Number of cases when they take care	% of the total sample	Average time input (for relevant cases only)*
Father	113		94.0
Elder Sister	48		149.4
Grandparent	28		181.1

* These figures are slightly different from average which include in the numerator those who do not contribute any time input (e.g. Table 23,24).

Table 28

Average time spent by other Family Members on Childcare for Children with various ages

Age of child (months)	Time spent (minutes)
1 - 6	182.5 (12)
7 - 12	182.1 (14)
13 - 24	166.6 (38)
25 - 36	171.2 (47)
37 - 60	154.6 (28)
All ages	168.7 (139)

Table 29

Childcare time by other Members of the Family (except mother) for Children of Various Birth Order

Birth order	Average time spent by other members
1 - 2	137.7 (47)
3 - 4	164.2 (40)
5 - 8	193.4 (42)
9 and above	228.3 (10)
All	168.7 (139)

Table 30

Time spent by other family members on childcare in different types of families and among landowning groups

Land ownership	Average time spent (in minutes) on childcare by other family members		
	Nuclear family	Joint and extended	All types
0 - 50	130.9 (43)	160.0 (6)	134.3 (49)
51 - 100	144.3 (28)	289.2 (9)	179.5 (37)
101 - 200	163.7 (24)	254.4 (11)	189.4 (35)
201 - 300	137.1 (7)	280.0 (3)	180.0 (10)
301 +	168.8 (6)	255.0 (2)	190.4 (8)
All groups	146.6 (108)	265.6 (31)	168.7 (139)

Table 31

Time spent by other members of the family in
childcare of different age

Age of the child (months)	Time spent by other members in childcare
1 - 6	182.5(12)
7 - 12	182.1(14)
13 - 24	166.6(38)
25 - 36	167.7(48)
37 - 60	149.2(29)

Table 32

Time spent by the father on childcare in different types
of families and among landowning groups

Land ownership (decimals)	Average time (minutes) spent on child- care by the father					
	Nuclear family		Joint and extended family		Both types	
	Time	Cases	Time	Cases	Time	Cases
0 - 50	88.2	41	55.0	6	91.5	47
51 - 100	77.9	28	63.3	7	74.9	35
101 - 200	66.9	24	76.4	11	69.9	35
201 - 300	94.3	7	90.0	3	93.0	10
301 +	33.8	6	60.0	2	40.4	8
All groups	81.3	106	69.1	29	78.7	135

Table 33

Number of times breastfeeding is done by mothers who spend varying time on childcare

Time spent on childcare (months)	Average number of breastfeeding give to child of ages (months)		
	1 - 12	12 - 24	25 - 36
01 - 360	11.4 (5)	9.3 (3)	4.8 (7)
361 - 540	10.7 (14)	8.6 (16)	5.4 (11)
541 - 600	11.0 (2)	9.3 (7)	3.2 (4)
601 and above	11.6 (5)	8.9 (9)	6.1 (11)
All groups	11.0 (26)	8.9 (35)	5.3 (33)

Table 34

Amount of time spent on breastfeeding by mothers who spend varying time on childcare

Time spent on childcare (minutes)	Average time (minutes spent on breastfeeding the baby)
01 - 360	114 (15)
361 - 480	126 (23)
481 - 540	166 (18)
541 - 600	102 (14)
601 and above	90 (25)
All groups	109 (95)

Table 35

Average time spent by mothers on breastfeeding
who perform various amount of household work

Time spent on housework (minutes)	Average amount of time spent on breastfeeding (minutes)
00 - 60	38 (13)
61 - 180	106 (17)
181 - 240	99 (14)
241 - 300	128 (22)
301 - 360	121 (19)
361 and above	90 (16)
All groups	114 (101)

We should conclude this section by emphasizing the fact that childcare in rural areas is predominantly the mother's task and the data on time input shows that others' contribution is small and provides no basis to believe that the mother leaves the child with other family members and non-members while she performs household or productive work.

The Implications of the Variation of Mother's Childcare Time for the Welfare of the Child.

Our emphasis on the time spent on childcare by the mother is rooted more importantly in our concern about the implications of such time for the children's well being. In an earlier section we discussed why in rural areas, mother substitutes from within the family are quite desirable and they cannot be compared with commercially oriented baby-minders.

Now we shall proceed to examine some of the implications of mothers childcare time for the welfare of the child. But we are limited to examine a few indicators only. These include the number of times a baby is breastfed and the time spent on such breastfeeding during the last twenty four hours. Data presented in Table 33 and 34 shows that the number of times of breastfeeding and amount of time spent on this activity does not vary systematically with the amount of childcare time. On the other hand such time does not show any systematic decline with an increase in other activity like household work by the mother. Table 35 relates mother's time in housework with

the time spent on breastfeeding. We have problems in relating the mothers childcare time with the situation of health which is a reflection of longer term situation. But we have the time budget for one day only. Yet we present the data on such comparison on the assumption that the time budget of the previous day reflects an usual situation. An unusual situation will arise if some of the adult family members are absent on that day. This was the case with few households. Of course the impact of the seasonal variation is not captured which again may be assumed to be similar for all mothers.

Table 36 shows that the time spent on childcare is not at all related systematically with the frequency of the occurrence of diseases. Here we should notice that the number of times suffered by each child is alarmingly high (5.5 times) during a year and only 7% children were free from any disease during the whole year. However, here it should be mentioned that the report on incidence of disease may not be appropriate in strict medical sense but are based on mother's perception about diseases⁴. The same disease might have recurred over a gap of a few days and often it is reported as suffering twice. Similarly, some symptoms which could be interpreted as disease, if a physician was consulted, might have been overlooked by the mother.

Table 36

Childcare time and the incidence of disease

Childcare time by the mother (minutes)	Incidence of disease during last one year
01 - 360	60 (19)
361 - 480	5.1 (28)
481 - 540	5.8 (22)
541 - 600	4.8 (18)
601 and above	5.6 (43)
All groups	5.5 (130)

Concluding Comments

The emphasis in the present paper has been twofold. Firstly how adequately the children's needs are fulfilled by the current practices of childcare and secondly, the time allocation to childcare by various members of the family and its implication.

We have seen that our fear that women may be moving away from breastfeeding practice is baseless. In the village, breastfeeding was universal and for many mothers it continued for more than two years. What is of more concern is that children are kept solely on breastmilk for an undesirable long period, when they need supplementary solid food. Even when they start solid food, the types of food given and the variety was found inadequate. Many of the children suffered from one disease or the other and suffered quite a few times during the span of one year. These are to some extent due to the lack of balanced food. Lack of cleanliness and living in an unclean environment (due to lack of safe water and unhygienic sanitary practices) which are in their turn due to not only the lack of resources but also to the lack of knowledge about the desirable practices.

These circumstances are the outcome of long traditions and it is the society at large and the family in particular which has to come forward to move in a desired direction. It is the responsibility of the policy makers and planners to see that an appropriate knowledge about the desirable childcare practices are disseminated. The suggestions should be formulated keeping

in view the resource constraints of rural families and the lack of infra-structural facilities and public utilities.

At the same time, the description of the role and tasks performed by the mother point out that by no means the mothers attach a low priority to childcare. The inadequacy in the provision of the requirements of children is not in any way related to the lack of time spent by the mother on childcare. Rather, we should recognise that the mothers spend a large part of their day in childcare which is made possible by taking on themselves the strain of a high intensity of work. These rural mothers opt for a long period of breastfeeding as this keeps the child happy. But we never ask, what these mothers get from the family and the society as they are devoted wholeheartedly to perform this reproductive role. We know from various studies that women in general lack control over resources and income in the family. They do not have much decision making power even in the family affairs. Over and above, these rural mothers suffer from lack of nutrition and ill health (Chowdhury 1984). Thus, if they are expected to contribute more, we have to improve their own situation and this should be viewed as an urgent issue and the problem of childcare and child-health has to be addressed simultaneously with the problem of mothers nutritional and overall social status. Attention to any single aspect will not only be fruitless, but may also be counter-productive.

Foot Notes

1. Grant (1985) rightly emphasises that: 'the fact that so many mothers in poor communities are already so overwhelmed by work and so unsupported by male dominated societies, that they have little time and energy left to put into action the child protection strategies which might now be placed at their disposal. (p 64).
2. Most researchers seem to emphasize the positive aspects of 'time budget survey' methodology (Miralao 1984) without any qualification.
3. Total time (minutes) spent on each activity performed jointly or separately was added and divided by 24x60 i.e. total time in a day to obtain intensity of work.
4. We included fever of any type, diarrhoea and dysentery, cough and cold, skin disease and other diseases as perceived by the mother.