

Assessing needs of children for childcare at Allama Iqbal Open University

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Abstract

The present study aimed to assess the children needs for childcare at daycare centre of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. Childcare is an important area for research as it directly affects the life of working women in an organization. The University has a daycare centre to facilitate those female employees having kids. It is situated in the main campus of the university. The mothers usually place their offspring in the daycare due to the need to work. The mothers visit daycare centre during duty hours and during break. The present study assessed the working conditions of the daycare centre and suggest some possible interventions for quality provisions and facilities at the daycare centre. It was a need assessment survey. The population of the study included mothers, daycare workers, ayas and members of the management committee of the daycare centre of AIOU. Data was collected through interview, checklists and observations of the care workers with children. It was a need assessment study. A checklist was used to record existing facilities at daycare. While, an interview was conducted regarding awareness, opinion and vision of the mothers and caregivers. Results indicated that the day care centre was equipped with necessary facilities. However, some of the facilities need to provided/upgraded. The study recommended active role of the parents in affairs of the daycare centre.

Key words: Early childhood Care, parenting, daycare needs, child rights, daycare workers

Introduction

When a person other than a parent watches and takes care of a child, it's called childcare. For many parents, finding good, reasonably priced creche for their children is a top priority, especially if they are younger than five. For working parents, childcare options might range from daily nursery to one-night babysitting. Needs for child care are satisfied in a variety of ways. Preschool-age children typically get care in one of three settings: at the house of the provider, in an organised child care centre, or in the home of the kid. When not enrolled in school, older children can get child care services through before- and after-school programmes or private summer school programmes. Child care services have become one of the most talked-about and rapidly expanding industries in the nation as more and more women enter the workforce. Preschools, Head Start facilities, group childcare facilities, and nursery schools are examples of formal child care centres. Independent contractors frequently charge for in-home care services. Children are cared for by others in their homes. Childcare can also be provided by occasional babysitters or persons who look after friends' or relatives' children unpaid in their homes. (Karen, 1991).

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The early childcare is very vital and cannot be overlooked. The foundational components of emotional intelligence, such as self-assurance, curiosity, self-discipline, connectivity, and the ability to collaborate and communicate, are developed in the formative years (Government of Pakistan, 2008). A substantial amount of data, including studies from the fields of neuroscience, sociology, and economics, indicates that positive early experiences can help prevent poverty, increase intergenerational social mobility, and provide the foundation for lifetime learning. The contributions of a few pioneering psychologists and educationists are crucial in this regard. As a result, the research work of Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and very well known Froebel is also being carried out today. (Mahmud et al., 2006).

The industrialised nations of the world have provided evidence of the need for childcare. Among them are demographic studies conducted by government, business, and nonprofit groups that support families and children. The sharp rise in the number of working parents—especially moms of small children—is largely responsible for the documentation of the need for daycare. Along with the government, a number of organisations and donors are doing childcare research in our nation. While the data from the federal and provincial levels have value, local communities must also collect and examine data unique to their own areas. A procedure like this would make it easier for different tiers of a community to work together to identify and rank services and resources.

The fact that employment rates for mothers of young children have dramatically grown both nationally and at the institution since its founding makes it even more crucial to perform research on childcare. In actuality, a sizable portion of women with children under three work, and as a result, their kids receive a significant quantity of non-maternal care.

The childcare centre of the Allama Iqbal Open University has been operating since long. The women working with young kids utilize the childcare centre of the university. These mothers often talk about the physical facilities and childcare workers of the centre. However, there is a need to conduct a need assessment survey using systematic approach to data collection, data analysis, and reporting of results about the daycare centre.

Literature Review

The care and supervision of a child or children, typically from the age of six weeks to the age of thirteen, is referred to as childcare, child minding, creche, or preschool. The act of watching over children by a nursery, babysitter, or other carers is known as childcare. The topic of childcare is vast and encompasses a variety of settings, pursuits, social and cultural norms, and establishments. The vast majority of childcare facilities that are in existence mandate that carers possess substantial training and are accredited. Early childhood education is a crucial but

frequently disregarded aspect of a child's development. Since creche providers are our kids' first teachers, they are essential to our early childhood education systems. Commercial daycare centres, also called commercial care centres, offer a controlled and uniform system of child care and are available for business during specific hours. Commercial daycare centres near workplaces are an option for parents, and some businesses provide in-house care.

Most nations maintain separate national strategies for the "care" and "education" of young children because of historical factors. In summary, as early as the 15th century, a number of European cities had set up child care centres for young children who were abandoned or in danger, a scenario that took many different forms throughout the world. A second development occurred in the 19th century when nation states, such as Sweden in 1836 and France in 1881, started to construct "infant schools" for young children before they entered school. The two organisations served quite different purposes: infant schools had an instructional goal, whereas childcare facilities concentrated on the survival and social protection of children. Preschools and early education nurseries were established to give children from wealthier social groups access to an early education and/or to expose children who speak a second language or a patois to the official national language and culture. As the modern state came into being and began to take on more responsibility for young children, ministries of health or social services were given responsibility for care services, while ministries of public instruction or education were given duty for "infant" or junior schools. For the time being, several OECD countries have maintained this division of responsibilities as the de facto form of governance.

In contrast to the majority of other nations, the Nordic region advanced its early childhood systems immediately following World War II. Since more women started to enter the workforce in these nations in the 1950s, there has been an increase in the need for childcare services. Since both the original social care programmes and infant schools were run at the municipal level, local administrations merged these services, usually placing the responsibility for social affairs, in order to maximise efficiency. A new integrated sector that was controlled by the Ministry of Social Affairs nationally arose. During the same time period, there was a similar trend throughout the Soviet zone of influence, when countries integrated children's services, usually under the purview of the ministry of education. Other nations have recently done the same. Driven by an increasing awareness of the need to formalise the concept of lifelong learning, early services have been introduced into the educational domain in Iceland (1976), New Zealand (1989), Spain (1990), Slovenia (1993), Sweden (1996), England and Scotland (1998), Norway (2005), and the Netherlands (2007), with varying degrees of success depending on the nation. Following the World Forum on Education for All (EFA) in Dakar in 2000, wherein the international community once again pledged to "Expanding and improving comprehensive early

childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" as one of the six EFA goals, early childhood education (ECE) started to regain prominence among Pakistan's education policy-makers.

The Government of Pakistan responded to this pledge by creating a long-term framework (2001–15) with ECE as one of its three focal areas and a detailed National Plan of Action (NPA) for EFA.2. Over 40,000 early childhood education (ECE) centres would be built over the relevant period, and over 3,000 ECE instructors would be hired and educated in the public sector each year, for a total of 51,000 teachers, according to the NPA. However, aside from the money the federal government gave the provinces for early childhood education (ECE) via the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) in 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, provincial budgets have not yet included any special funding for these objectives.

The National Education Policy (NEP 1998–2010) further reaffirmed that "Kachi class shall be institutionalised in the primary cycle gradually and progressively" and "Kachi class 3 at primary level shall be introduced as a part of the effort to improve achievements of pupils." Again, mainstream adoption is still very much a ways off. The fact that an ECE provision is not internalised into the primary education budget share is a persistent limitation of the yearly sector-wide budgeting and planning exercise for the education sector. There is very little money left over for ECE training or the acquisition of basic educational tools in accordance with laws and commitments. A significant portion of the budget—roughly 90%—is set up for teacher salaries and school operating expenses.

The first eight years of a child's life lay the groundwork for the development of lifelong abilities. A child needs a strong framework for growth during this time, which includes good health, a safe and supportive environment, and the correct amount of mental stimulation. All parts of the world have seen an increase in pre-primary enrollment, with developing nations recently expanding access to preschool programmes. However, millions of young children in low- and middle-income nations under the age of five today are unable to fulfil their developmental potential due to the detrimental effects of poverty, dietary deficits, and insufficient early learning opportunities. (Parwaan,2015). Thirty percent of Pakistan's population is under 14 years old, making up 35 percent of the country's total population. Experts in education and health stress the need of ECED promotion in order to give every child the opportunity to realise their full potential as members of society. Eight million children under the age of five live in Pakistan, where extreme poverty prevents them from reaching their full developmental potential. Of these, 49% are not enrolled in school at all, and over 6.5 million are not enrolled in primary education. Pakistan is home to the second-highest percentage of youngsters who do not attend school. (Mahmud,2014)

Children aged 0 to 9 are experiencing severe health conditions as a result of parents' ignorance of ECED. The current infant mortality rate is 57 deaths for every 1000 live births. In order to mainstream ECED and give stakeholders a platform for cooperation, action is required.

Research Objectives

Based on the above arguments, following were the objectives of the study:

- i. To assess accurate picture of the available child care facility at AIOU
- ii. To identify unmet needs for child care
- iii. To determine causes of inadequate care
- iv. To gather data on funding sources for child care program
- v. To determine the best use of child care funds
- vi. To highlight some best practices in daycare centre

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the purposes of childcare?
2. What kind of support and activities are provided for cognitive, physical and aesthetic development of the kids in daycare centre of AIOU?
3. Are the caregivers at AIOU professionally trained?
4. Do caregivers offer the meal/medicine to the children from what their mothers provide?
5. Do the mothers own the daycare centre of AIOU?
6. What is the hygienic condition of the centre?
7. What kind of social environment persists in the daycare centre?
8. Does the environment of daycare effect the development of children?
9. Is enough financial and technical support available to daycare centre from the management committee?
10. Are the mothers and management committee initiated any capacity building opportunities for caregivers?

Method of the study

This is a need assessment survey of the daycare services. Survey of the daycare in AIOU was conducted to examine the facilities and best practices. The population of the study included mothers, care workers and management committee of the daycare centre of AIOU. Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample of the study. Data collected through Interview of mothers, caregivers and members of management committee. A checklist was also used to assess the facilities and funds available at the daycare centre. Observations of daycare workers with children also conducted. In addition to surveying mothers, data was also collected on various demographic factors related to families, parents and children. The framework for tools based on the following construct and sub constructs:

Construct	Sub-constructs	Indicators	Stakeholder
Capacity/ Infrastructure/ facilities	Physical facilities Furniture Learning materials Maintenance Purchase of goods/items	No of rooms No of washrooms No of computers No of beds/chairs Play area First aidbox/medicines Food & drinks Cleaning products Towels Mats Play props Slides Containers Bead mazes Lacing toys Finger paints Color markers Puzzles with knobs and large pieces Tinker toys Magnetic blocks Stringing beads	Members management committee Mothers Children Care workers

		Puzzles with and without frame Three dimensional art Brushes Rattles Clean teething toys Crayons Water colors Glue Scrape paper Plastic toys Blocks TV Computer games Play ground equipments Charts Purchase procedure Allocated funds	
Human resources	Caregivers Ayas Nurse	No of caregivers No of ayas No of nurse Qualification Certification Training	Caregivers Ayas Nurse
Child care	Child health Child protection Child cognitive growth Child social growth Child physical growth	Appropriate health and safety practices Age appropriate environment Cleanliness conditions No of sleeping hours Curriculum & observation Emerging language & literacy Mother involvement Comprehensive support services	Children Care givers Mothers

		Picnic & Party Healthy eating Children literature Play in group Camping	
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Data analysis and findings

Day care is a child care option provided for infants and toddlers, preschoolers and school aged children that allows parents to drop off their children during the day for care, supervision and learning such centers specialize in infant care through pre-schoolers. Some daycare facilities also offer before and after school care for school age children.

This data related to the facilities available at the daycare of Allam Iqbal Open university was collected through check list. Data showed that the daycare consisted of 3 caregivers and 19 children. It has been found that the daycare has not been fully equipped with all the required facilities for toddlers and pre-schoolers. There is proper ventilation and natural lightning through windows. Daycare has neat and clean environment. There is adequate space available for several activities to happen at once (e.g., quiet play, play with blocks can happen at same time). Adequate and clean outside space is available for outdoor play and gross motor activities. Toilets were neat and clean. Facilitators help the children to get materials and use and play with them.

There were only two tables, one air conditioner, one water dispenser, a telephone, heater, microwave oven and fridge. There were four CCTV cameras fixed in daycare. Apart from that daycare is well carpeted. Proper kitchen accessories and cutleries were available in the daycare. Facility of generator is available in daycare

However, following facilities have been found to be inadequate:

- Indoor space that allows children and adults to move freely.
- Proper furniture and equipments for routine play and learning of children. Furniture includes only three mattresses and three beddings, two high chairs, two table sets and one baby cot. There are no plastic chairs, rockers, rocker cum bouncer.
- Inadequate learning corners.
- Inadequate space for sand and water play.
- Less number of toys and blocks, books and reading materials.

- Apart from inadequate number of blocks, there is no reading material; color pencils, crayons, flash cards, writing board etc are also not available.
- There was no fire-alarm and fire-extinguisher, electric insect killer, and vacuum cleaner.

Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

1. Child care is a specialized field, therefore the ECE workers may be provided appropriate training.
2. Sufficient learning materials may be provided to daycare centre. Children literature may also be provided.
3. Parents may be fully engaged in the day to day affairs of the daycare centre. Parent committee may be activated in this regard.
4. Appropriate budgetary allocation may be made for daycare centre.

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