



# Parenting Matters

## Examining Parenting Approaches and Practices in Early Childhood Years



for every child

Highlights from a formative study  
UNICEF India Country Office | November 2018

Early Childhood Development is a crucial focus area in the UNICEF India Country Programme 2018-2022. In 2018, UNICEF commissioned Kantar Public to carry out a formative study on parenting practices with the objective of assessing existing beliefs, practices, and behaviours of parents, extended family and service providers. The study also captured perspectives of 8-10 year-old children on parenting. It explored five key domains of responsive parenting – caregiving practices; stimulation practices; support and responsiveness; structure; and socialisation. This brochure presents key findings of the formative study along these five domains.

### The Need to Focus on Parenting

The early years in a child’s life build the foundation for their growth and development. Positive parenting is critical in early childhood. A lack of positive relationships, and inadequate supervision and involvement with children are strongly associated with a child’s increased risk for behavioural and emotional problems. They also affect brain development, with a long-term impact on children.

### Key objectives of the formative study



Exploring current beliefs, practices and behaviour of parents, extended family members and influencers in early childcare

Examining prevalent parenting styles, influence of gender of the caregiver and child on caregiving styles, and prevailing caregiving support systems



Finally, to focus on strengthening the understanding of parenting practices at three levels – parents (both mother and father); extended family (grandparents and community); and service providers (including Anganwadi Workers [AWWs] and ASHAs).

The findings of the study have been categorised in three thematic areas to highlight:

1 Caregiving and stimulation practices, and gender socialisation

2 Support, responsiveness and structure

3 Parenting support

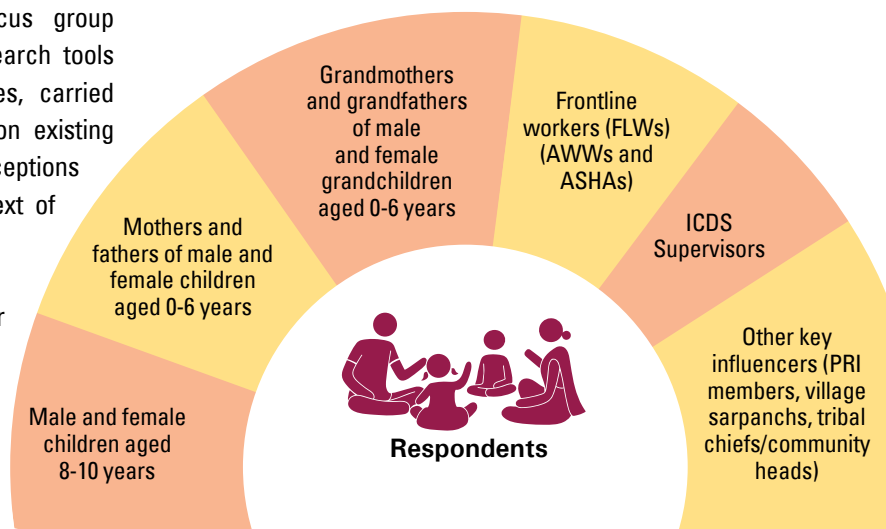
### Methodology

The formative study covered five states with two districts each in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, three districts in Rajasthan and four districts in Maharashtra.

Participatory tools, in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations were key research tools employed for the study. Around 250 such activities, carried out across these five states, provided information on existing knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) and perceptions among these communities and families in the context of responsive parenting practices.

Six hundred frontline workers were met in Dungarpur and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan and Aurangabad, Yavatmal, Palghar and Pune districts of Maharashtra to understand their role in providing support to the

parents. A qualitative approach was employed. They were interviewed as a dyad using a detailed questionnaire, to assess their knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on support provided and to understand the nature of their engagement with parents and the issues faced, if any.



# Key Findings of the Study

## Knowledge, attitudes, practices and perceptions on caregiving

### Caregiving and stimulation practices, and gender socialisation

**Mothers and grandmothers** provide care to the child. They wake up, bathe, massage, feed, and put the child to sleep

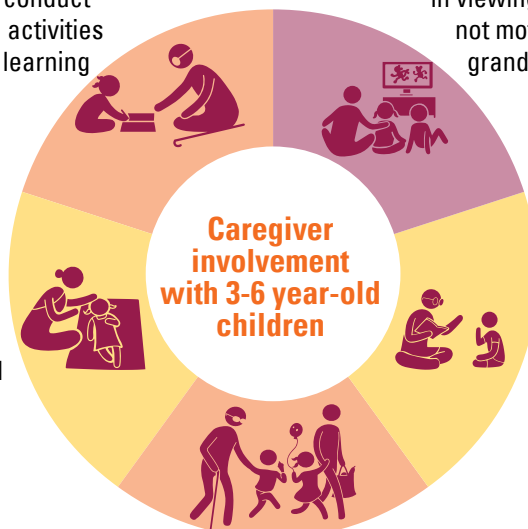


**Fathers and grandfathers** take the children outdoors and to the market. Their involvement in feeding is lesser than that of mothers and grandmothers

**Mothers** play with their 0-3 year-old girls and **fathers** play with their 0-3 year-old boys

**Grandparents** spend time talking to children, narrating stories, reciting poems, singing lullabies and supervising them when children are engaged amongst themselves

**Grandfathers and fathers** take the child to the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) and conduct home-based activities to promote learning



**Fathers and grandfathers** accompany children in viewing television, not mothers and grandmothers

**Mothers** are involved in storytelling and singing only while feeding the child or putting the child to sleep

**Grandfathers** tell children stories and recite poems and songs

**Only fathers and grandfathers** take children (both girls and boys) outdoors

## Values imparted



**Primarily good manners** such as greeting elders, avoiding use of abusive language, avoiding bad company and not getting involved in fights

## Gender socialisation



### Restrictions on girl children:

Mothers impose time restrictions on 3-6 year-old female children, ask them to be mindful of what they wear, be polite to people, obey their elders and sit 'properly'. Grandparents advise 4-6 year-old female children to walk slowly in front of elders and keep their eyes down



**Household chores:** Fathers instruct female children to engage in household chores

**Toys and games:** In the 0-3 year age group girls and boys play with the same toys except for dolls, which only girls play with. In the 3-6 years age group, male children ride bicycles, play board games like ludo, carrom, marbles and *gilli danda*.



## Pre-school education

### Perceptions about best age for enrolment in AWC



Mothers feel that children should be enrolled between the ages of 3 and 6 years

Fathers feel that children should be enrolled between the ages of 2.5 and 6 years

Grandparents perceive 2 to 5 years as the best age for enrolment

### Perceptions on benefits of pre-school education



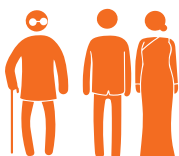
Children learn to read and write, and are also fed well

After attending sessions at AWC, children start developing interest in studies

Children usually enjoy their stay at the AWC as they get to play games, play with toys, sing songs, dance and interact with other children

Sending the child to the AWC makes the child learn to live away from home, cultivate discipline and develop good habits

### Involvement of parents and grandparents



There is no interaction or involvement of caregivers in children's pre-school education

Mothers of 3-6 year-old children do not have requisite interaction with AWWs to discuss the child's learning at the AWC

Fathers of 3-6 year-olds have limited interaction with AWWs about the child's learning and development

Involvement of grandparents in pre-school education is limited to dropping off and picking the child from AWC

## Support, responsiveness and structure

### Setting boundaries for children's safety and security

- Mostly parents advise children about physical boundaries, i.e.

- ◆ Do not engage with strangers or intoxicated people
- ◆ Return home directly after school (specific to 3-6 year-olds)
- ◆ Avoid going outside after dark
- ◆ Avoid getting involved in fights while playing



- They also advise children about prevention of accidents

- ◆ Cross the road safely
- ◆ Do not run on the stairs
- ◆ Do not peep down from the rooftop
- ◆ Do not play with stones or sharp objects
- ◆ Do not touch electrical appliances and objects
- ◆ Stay away from wild animals and insects
- ◆ Avoid going near water bodies/wells



- Most fathers and some grandparents consider witnessing physical violence at home as a form of threat for children
- Rape is highlighted as a threat for female children
- Some female children are instructed not to go to others' homes to play
- Few grandfathers recognise that girl children can face sexual abuse or violence.



### Prevalence of violence in the household

#### 30 different forms of violence and abuse mentioned by respondents



**Physical violence:** burning; pinching; pushing; shaking; slapping with hands; beating with stick; twisting of ears; hitting with an object; beating with implements like belts, rods etc.

**Verbal abuse:** blaming; criticising; shouting at the child; calling hurtful names; subjecting the child to bad language



**Witnessing physical violence and verbal abuse:** towards one of the parents; towards one of the siblings; outside the family



**Emotional abuse:** restricting movement; denying food; ridiculing/mock; ignoring the child; creating fear; discriminating; comparing; bullying; sending the child away from home; secluding or leaving the child unattended; threatening with bodily harm

### Effect of violence on children: Perspectives of 8-10 year-old children



They feel agitated and want to stop domestic fights

Some female children blame themselves for the violence, and isolate themselves from their parents out of fear

Few male children feel anger towards their fathers

Most children feel scared and do not wish to be exposed to any violent and abusive acts in the household

## Disciplining: Perspectives of 8-10 year-old children

### Children are disciplined in households for...



Disobeying parents and not completing assigned tasks

Not being willing to study or not completing their homework

Fighting with siblings

Being naughty and damaging things at home

Refusing to do household chores or not taking them up voluntarily

Playing or watching TV for too long

## Gender differences in disciplining

### Girls...

Interfering in their parents' fights

Scoring less marks

Leaving their hair open

Making frequent and 'unnecessary' demands

Losing money

Refusing to eat food

Not finishing their household chores



### Boys...

Refusing to work in fields and in hotels

Disrespecting elders and abusing



## Disciplining outside home

### At school



Not completing homework

Long periods of absence

Picking fights

Making noise in class

Not greeting teachers

Not paying attention in class

Not being well groomed

Cheating in exams

Engaging in acts of theft

### At community level



Picking up fights in public

Irking elders in the community

Damaging someone's belongings

Playing with insects and reptiles such as snakes

## Ways of disciplining



**Verbal abuse:**  
Shouting, scolding, abusing

**Verbal intimidation:**  
Creating fear using threat of 'I will hit you' or 'I will tell so and so'

**Emotional abuse:**  
Restricting movement, criticising

**Physical violence:**  
Slapping, twisting ears, beating with stick, hitting with whatever comes handy, tying child to bed, tying legs to chair

## How children respond to disciplining



Laugh or feel embarrassed to try to normalise the experience

Rationalise the impact by feeling guilty about making a mistake

Demonstrate extreme rebellion

Acknowledge pain and resort to crying

Most approach or are approached by their elder sibling, grandparents, uncles or aunts after they are disciplined at home

## Parenting support

### Existing parenting support

**Mother-in-law:** for help and support regarding food and childcare practices

**FLWs:** for schemes and services for children

**Doctors:** for serious health-related issues

**Neighbours, friends and other relatives:** for childcare

### Awareness of schemes and services



#### Mothers

- Most were aware of Dhanalakshmi<sup>1</sup> scheme and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana<sup>2</sup>
- In Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, mothers were aware of:
  - ◆ Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card
  - ◆ Immunization
  - ◆ Institutionalised delivery
  - ◆ Provision for free education, uniform and scholarships in government schools
  - ◆ Counselling of girls in the age group of 15-18 years, on self-hygiene and menstrual hygiene
- In Chhattisgarh, mothers were aware of Mehtaari Sewa (provision for ambulance) at the time of delivery
- In Madhya Pradesh, some were aware of Ladli Lakshmi Yojana<sup>3</sup>, M-Mitra<sup>4</sup> and Pradhan Mantri Maatru Vandana Yojana<sup>5</sup>.



#### Fathers

- Some were aware of services such as health camps, complementary food and vaccinations
- Most were able to identify the MCP card but unable to provide details of the scheme
- Few were aware of grant for institutional delivery



#### Grandparents

- Grandmothers were much more aware than grandfathers about services such as:
  - ◆ MCP card
  - ◆ Immunization
  - ◆ Provision of institutional delivery
  - ◆ Provision of free education, uniform and scholarships in government schools.

### Expectations from ASHAs and AWWs

#### Mothers



**Most mothers were satisfied** with support provided by FLWs for healthcare

In Rajasthan, few mentioned seeking more information regarding schemes and services from FLWs

#### Fathers



Few expected evening classes and increase in hours of engagement to three hours per day for pre-school education

**Most wanted guidance on government schemes for kids** and help with availing benefits

They expect guidance from ASHAs to take better care for their children

Few desired a home visit from AWW every week

#### Grandparents



**Most were satisfied with services provided**

Expectations varied across states related to:

- Increase in frequency of visits
- More information on government schemes.

<sup>1</sup> A conditional cash transfer scheme for the girl child with insurance cover, to ensure survival of the girl child and assure a better life for her.

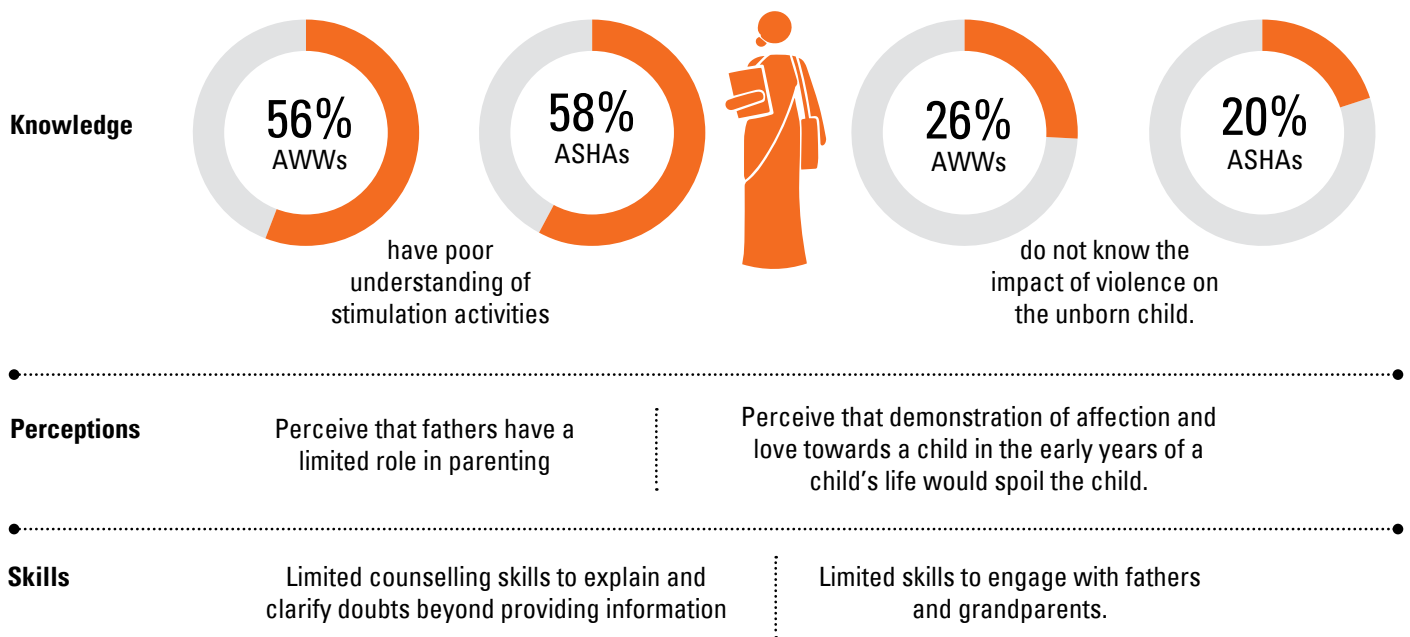
<sup>2</sup> A small deposit scheme of the Government of India launched as a part of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) campaign. The scheme is meant to meet the education and marriage expenses of the girl child.

<sup>3</sup> A scheme of the Government of Madhya Pradesh for conditional cash transfer to a girl child from a poor economic background to encourage her education

<sup>4</sup> A free mobile voice call service for targeted messaging to enrolled women through their pregnancy and infancy of their child on preventive care

<sup>5</sup> A maternity benefit programme of the Government of India

## Knowledge, perceptions and skills of FLWs



## Key recommendations



Investments should be made in building capacities of FLWs to:

- better engage with caregivers
- improve their caregiving skills
- instil values conducive to building a positive environment for the child.

With improved KAP, they can interact better with different stakeholders.

FLWs should:



Work towards enhancing the quality of a mother's engagement with her child



Further explore and strengthen the potential of a father's role in caregiving for their children

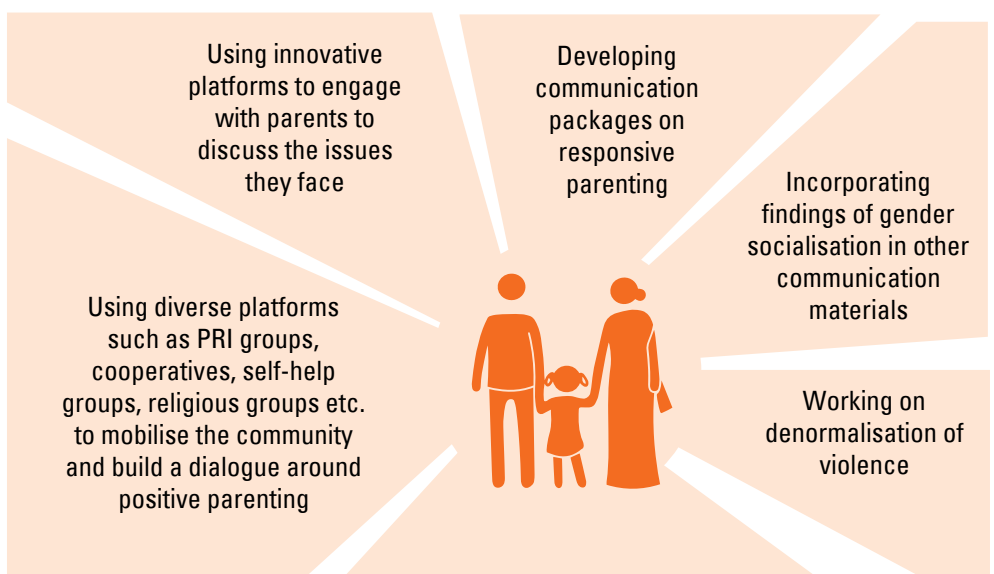


Actively engage with grandparents

## Role of social and behaviour change in strengthening parenting norms

Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) plays a crucial role in creating a dialogue around positive parenting. The study findings can be used to develop interpersonal communication content for transaction with parents.

### Recommended SBCC interventions to promote positive parenting approaches and practices





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