

Involvement of Rural Parents in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children

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Abstract

A study was conducted in four villages of Parbhani district, Marathwada region of Maharashtra state to examine the early child care practices adopted by rural parents. The open ended questionnaire was developed on ' Early childcare practices adopted by rural parents. The study revealed that the majority of rural parents (96.66% of mothers and 82.66% of rural fathers) opted for immediate healthcare provider visits, rural mothers (85.33%) and rural fathers (40%) availed government healthcare programs. The daily involvement in play activities with children were reported by 53.33 per cent rural mothers and only 5.33 per cent rural fathers. In terms of selecting play materials, based on the children's capacity and potential, only 20 per cent of rural mothers and 56.66 per cent of rural fathers adopted this practice. Very less percentage of rural mother (8.33%) and none of the rural father were involved in providing educational posters to their young children, while similar trend was found in case of providing building blocks, musical instruments. Most rural mothers and rural fathers prioritized age-appropriate, safe, durable to sustain and child friendly toys, a small percentage considering developmental milestones.

On the whole statistically, no significant differences were recorded with regard to providing educational, kitchen play equipment, Tricycles and charts. Significantly higher percentage of rural fathers were providing mobile games as compared to rural mothers which throws light on casual behaviour of rural fathers, while significantly higher percentage of rural mothers were providing soft toys as compared to rural fathers. Involvement of rural fathers needs to be increased in

providing age appropriate educational play materials for wholesome development of early childhood children.

Introduction

Rural parents play a crucial role in shaping a stimulating learning environment for their young children, impacting their development in various ways. Their involvement can range from creating a supportive home environment to actively participating in school activities.

In recent decades, parental involvement (PI) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been increasingly recognized as an important source of support for all children, particularly the socio-economically disadvantaged (Epstein, 1995; Jeynes, 2007). Studies have shown that PI, beginning as early as the preschool years, has positive effects on children's literacy and mathematics skills (e.g. Stylianides and Stylianides, 2011). PI is considered especially important for decreasing or even closing the achievement gap between children from lower and higher-income families (e.g. Dearing et al., 2006). The positive effects of PI in pre-school on school readiness are consolidated by studies that underline its importance for high educational attainment in later primary school (Park and Holloway, 2013). Increasingly, PI in children's learning from infancy is being encouraged by a wide range of agencies such as federal and state governments, health services and community organizations (Nichols et al., 2009). PI in early learning at home can be intensified by academic opportunities and activities in which parents participate to support the child's learning and foster family and moral values. This is considered especially beneficial for children living in disadvantaged societal conditions and/or at risk of school failure. In this context, discussions about the partnership model – parents and teachers working together to 'reach common goals' for children – have emerged. Epstein (1995) identified six types of PI, classified by what parents can do at home and at school. In this typology, which is known worldwide, the most frequent type of PI activity was helping in the classroom, followed by attending parent meetings (Castro et al., 2004). However, these activities can be criticized because they instrumentalize parents as tools in the school environment. Similarly, policy-makers

and researchers tended to describe PI in relation to a range of school-based PI activities (Gross et al., 2020; Li, Liu and Guo, 2019). The range of possible PI is commonly narrowed down to behaviours that are only visible in school settings, often reducing it to 'school-centric involvement' (Manz, Fantuzzo and Power, 2004). Moreover, the perspective of parents in rural areas is included in the research less often than that of parents in urban settings. Due to lack of representation in the US-based research, parents who are low-income, racial/ ethnic minorities and/or living in rural areas seem to be viewed from a deficit perspective that characterizes them as more 'incompetent' or 'unwilling' to be involved in children's early learning than their higher-income, White counterparts (e.g. Durand and Perez, 2013). The concepts and interpretations of PI developed in these studies might not fit non-Western conditions. More research is needed that does not assume that these conceptualizations of PI are universally valid, but instead examines nuances embedded in specific cultural, geographical and historical settings. It will be increasingly important not only to normatively describe how PI is to be implemented but also to investigate how parents themselves give it meaning in early learning at home. Evidence shows that parents and educators tend to define involvement differently (Anderson and Minke, 2007). Relatively little research has explicitly examined parents' views about involvement in early learning at home, and even less in countries outside the USA, Canada and Europe, such as rural China. Although Chinese children stand out as high achievers on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), Chinese parents have rarely attracted the attention of researchers in education. To our knowledge, no study to date has examined rural Chinese parents' perspectives on involvement in children's early learning. Recognizing the family and the pre-school as two important microsystems that influence the child (Arndt et al., 2013), this study explores PI in early learning at home in rural China. It aims to help close this gap in our current knowledge by analysing how rural Chinese parents are involved in their children's early learning.

Methodology

A study was conducted in four villages of Parbhani district, Marathwada region of Maharashtra state to examine the early child care practices adopted by rural parents. To carry out researcher

study a purposively selected sample of 300 rural parents (150 rural mothers and 150 rural fathers) in the age group of 18-45 years residing in four villages of Parbhani district, those who were having 2-6 years early childhood children. The open ended questionnaire was developed on 'Early childcare practices' adopted by rural parents. The data pertaining to the study was collected by personally interviewing the sample rural parents based on open ended interview schedule cum checklist for obtaining information additionally required for the study as well as to cross validate the information given by the rural parents regarding childcare practices adopted by them.

Tools used for the research

Socio economic status scale: Kuppuswamy's modified Socio-Economic Status scale 2020 was used to assess the socio economic status of selected rural parents in rural area. The socio- economic status of the families was assessed based on the information related to education, occupation and monthly income of the sample rural parents. Based on obtained information, after dividing the score of both parents by 2, the rural parents were categorised and mentioned as per the SES scale below.

Score	Socio economic status
16-25	Upper Middle (II)
11-15	Lower middle (III)
5-10	Upper Lower (IV)
Below 5	Lower (V)

Table 1 reveals about background information of the sample rural parents. Irrespective of gender, with regard to their type of family, it was recorded that relatively a higher percentage of the rural

parents were from nuclear families (63.33%) followed by joint families (31.33%) and extended families (5%). Irrespective of gender about 53.33 per cent of the sample rural parents belonged to the small sized families followed by the middle size (36.66%) and large size (5%) families.

With respect to the family monthly income, it was observed that irrespective of gender relatively a higher percentage of rural parent's family monthly income was below Rs.10,000 (Rural mothers 70% and rural fathers 33.33%) followed by Rs.10,000 to Rs.20,000 (Rural mothers 28.66% and rural fathers 55.33%) and above Rs.20,000 (Rural mothers 1.33% and rural fathers 11.33%). However about the socio- economic status of the rural parents about 35 per cent of rural mothers and 36.66 per cent belonged to upper lower socio-economic status, while 28.66 per cent of rural mothers and 31.33 per cent rural fathers belonged to lower middle socio-economic status followed by lower socio-economic status (Rural mothers 22.66 and rural fathers 18.66%). However about 13.33 per cent of rural fathers observed to be in upper middle socio-economic status.

It is clear from the results that majority of sample rural parents (53.33% rural mothers and 40% rural fathers) completed high school education followed by HSC/Diploma (20% rural mothers and 28.66% rural fathers), Middle school education (12.66% rural mothers and 8% rural fathers), Graduation (2% rural mothers and 21.33% rural fathers), Post graduation (1.33% rural mothers and 2% rural fathers) and few mothers (10.66%) had completed only primary education.

Table 1: Background information of the sample rural parents

Parental Background information	Percentages of parents (300)	
	Rural mothers (150)	Rural fathers (150)
Age of parents		

18-25	75.33 (113)	32.66 (49)
26-35	24.66 (37)	62.00 (93)
35-45	-	05.33 (08)
Family type		
Nuclear	63.33 (95)	63.33 (95)
Joint	31.33 (47)	31.33 (47)
Extended	05.00 (08)	05.00 (08)
Family Size		
Small (<4)	53.33 (80)	53.33 (80)
Middle (5-8)	36.66 (55)	36.66 (55)
Large (>5)	10.00 (15)	10.00 (15)
Family monthly income		
Below 10,000	70.00 (105)	33.33 (50)
10,000-20,000	28.66 (43)	55.33 (83)
Above 20,000	01.33 (02)	11.33 (17)
Socio-economic Status		
Upper middle	13.33 (20)	13.33 (20)
Lower middle	28.66 (43)	31.33 (47)
Upper lower	35.00 (53)	36.66 (55)

Lower	22.66 (34)	18.66 (28)
Education		
Primary School educated	10.66 (16)	-
Middle school educated	12.66 (19)	08.00 (12)
High school educated	53.33 (80)	40.00 (60)
HSC / Diploma	20.00 (30)	28.66 (43)
Graduate	02.00 (03)	21.33 (32)
Post graduate	1.33 (02)	02.00 (03)
Occupation		
Professionals	00.66 (01)	05.33 (08)
Semi-professionals	---	08.66 (13)
Clerical / shop/ farm	42.66 (64)	58.66 (88)
Semi-skilled workers	---	08.66 (13)
Unskilled workers	---	18.66 (28)
Home makers	56.66 (85)	---

(Figures in parentheses indicate frequencies) With regard to the parental occupation of the children, it was observed that the higher percentage of rural fathers were shop-owners or farm/clerical workers (58.66%), while the remaining children's fathers were semi-skilled workers (8.66%), unskilled workers (18.66%), semi-professional workers (8.66%) and professional workers (5.33%). On the other hand the higher percentage of the rural mothers were home-makers (56.66%) followed by farm workers (42.66%) and professional worker (0.66%).

Involvement of rural parents in providing stimulatory environment to their young children is illustrated in table 2 and fig 1. It is obvious from the results that most of the rural mothers (53.33 %) were engaged in play activities with their young children as compared to rural father's (5.33%), 20.00 per cent of rural mothers were involved in play activities with children for 2 to 3 times a week as compared to rural fathers (6.66%), on the other hand more than half of the (60.00%) rural fathers and only 13.33 per cent rural mothers were involved in play activities with young children once in a week. While irrespective of rural parent's gender, about 11.66 per cent rural mothers and 13.33 per cent of their rural fathers were reported to be rarely involved in play activities with their young children.

With regard to types of play activities, typically rural parents engaged in with their young children, majority (75.66 % and 78.66%) of the rural mothers were engaged in art and craft activities as well as story narration respectively. With regard to puzzle or building blocks, 66.66 per cent rural mothers and 18 per cent of rural fathers were involved, outdoor activities like sports and farming, 58.66 per cent rural mothers and 52 per cent rural fathers were involved. On the other hand, half of the (75.33%) rural mothers were engaged in art and craft activities as compared to rural fathers (51.33%), 48.66 per cent rural fathers were engaged in physical games such as running, jumping. On the other hand only 13.33 per cent rural mothers were engaged in such activities, only rural mothers (45.33%) were engaged in a pretend play, role playing, make believe play and board games or card games play (8.66%), where as rural father's engagement was not seen at all also no engagements of rural fathers were reported regarding story narration to their young children.

The statistical results indicated that except no significant differences in rarely played with their young children, highly significant differences were found in engagement of rural parents as higher percentage of rural mothers were engaged in Play activities on daily basis as compared to rural fathers. Based on gender of rural parents significantly higher percentage of rural mothers were involved in providing stimulatory learning environment as compared to rural fathers. On the other

hand a significantly higher percentage of rural fathers were involved in physical games which reflects the gender role differences in rural mothers and rural father.

Table 2: Involvement of rural parents in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children

Involvement of rural parents in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children	Percentages (300)		Z values
	Rural mothers (150)	Rural fathers (150)	
Involvement of rural parents in play activities of young children			
Daily	53.33 (83)	05.33 (08)	10.79**
2-3 times in a week	20.00 (30)	06.66 (10)	03.69**
Once in a week	13.33 (20)	60.00 (90)	09.69**
Rarely	11.33 (17)	13.33 (20)	00.53 ^{NS}
Involvement of rural parents in various types of play activities			
Art and craft activities	75.33 (113)	51.33 (77)	04.44**
Puzzles or building blocks	66.66 (100)	18.00 (27)	09.64**
Outdoor activities sports, gardening, farming.	58.66 (88)	52.00 (78)	01.05 NS
Pretend play, role-playing, make-believe	45.33 (68)	-	-
Story narration	13.33 (20)	-	-
Physical games (Running, Jumping, etc.)	13.33 (20)	48.66 (73)	07.12**

Board games or card games	08.66 (13)	-	-
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Figures in parentheses indicate frequencies **P < 0.01 level NS – Non Significant

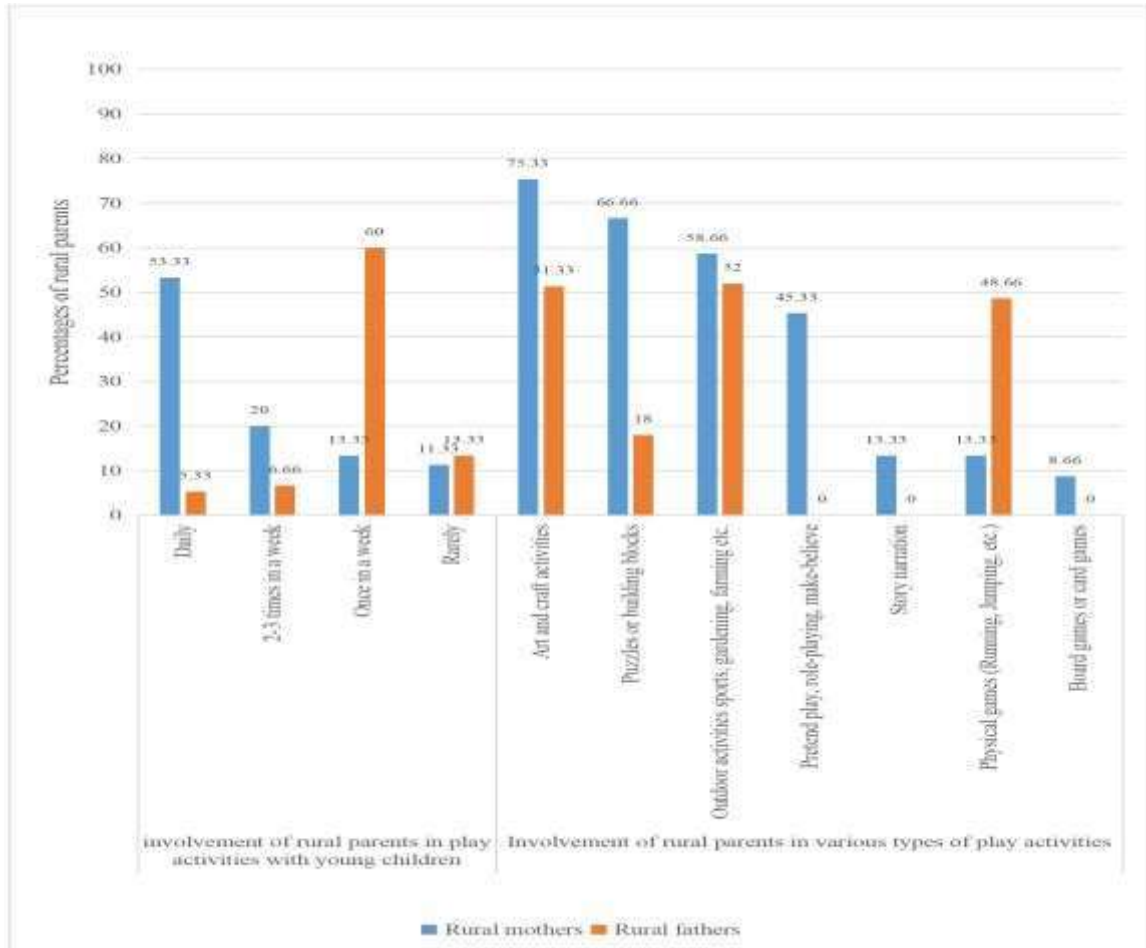


Fig.1 Involvement of rural parents in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children

The result reveals in table 3 and Fig 2 outline the rural parental practices employed for boosting creativity and incorporation of learning in the play activities for their young children. In terms of encouraging imaginative play and story narration, majority of (95.33% each) the rural mothers and only 36.66 per cent rural fathers were involved in it. Majority rural mothers (83.33 %) and 43.33 per cent rural fathers were choosing educational toys and games for their children. Whereas 75.33 per cent of rural mothers were encouraging problem solving and critical thinking

in their young children as compared to rural fathers (10%). Providing art supplies and materials to their young children 40 per cent rural fathers were engaged in it while only 20 per cent of rural mothers were providing it, on the other hand, with regard to cultural events or any sort of exhibitions, rural fathers (33.33%) were taking their young children for attending it while very negligible (6.66%) rural mothers were involved in such activities. In case of allowing young children to explore and experiments with different activities only 13.33 per cent rural fathers and 05.00 per cent rural mothers were involved in it.

Table 3: Efforts taken by rural parents for boosting creativity of their young children

Efforts taken by rural parents for boosting creativity of their young children	Percentages (300)		Z values
	Rural mothers (150)	Rural fathers (150)	
Tried for developing maths concepts	95.33 (143)	36.66 (55)	13.71**
Encouraged story narration, imaginative Play	95.33 (143)	-	-
Provided educational toys and games	83.33 (125)	43.33 (65)	07.88**
Encouraged for developing problem-solving skills and critical thinking	75.33 (113)	10.00 (15)	15.11**
Ta Explained about nature and the environment during outdoor play	23.33 (35)	13.33 (20)	06.01**

Provided art materials	20.00 (30)	40.00 (60)	03.87**
Taken them to cultural events or exhibitions	6.66 (10)	33.33 (50)	06.28**
Allowed them to explore their environment	5.33 (08)	13.33 (20)	02.44*

Figures in parentheses indicate frequencies

*p < 0.05 **P < 0.01 level NS – Non Significant

Significantly higher percentage of rural mothers were adopted practices like tried for developing maths concepts, encouraged story narration, imaginative play, provided educational toys and games, encouraged for developing problem solving skills and critical thinking. While, significant higher percentage of rural fathers were providing art supplies and materials as well as taking them to see cultural events or exhibitions as compared to rural mothers. While 13.33 per cent rural fathers engaged in teaching young children about nature and the environment during outdoor play as compared to (23.33%) rural mothers. Statistical analysis revealed that except allowing young children to explore, a highly significant differences were found in rural fathers and rural mothers in adoption of various practices regarding encouragement of their young children's creativity and incorporation of learning into play activities.

From these results it can be suggested that there is a great need of increasing rural father's involvement and adoption practices for encouraging their young children's creativity and incorporating learning through play activities.

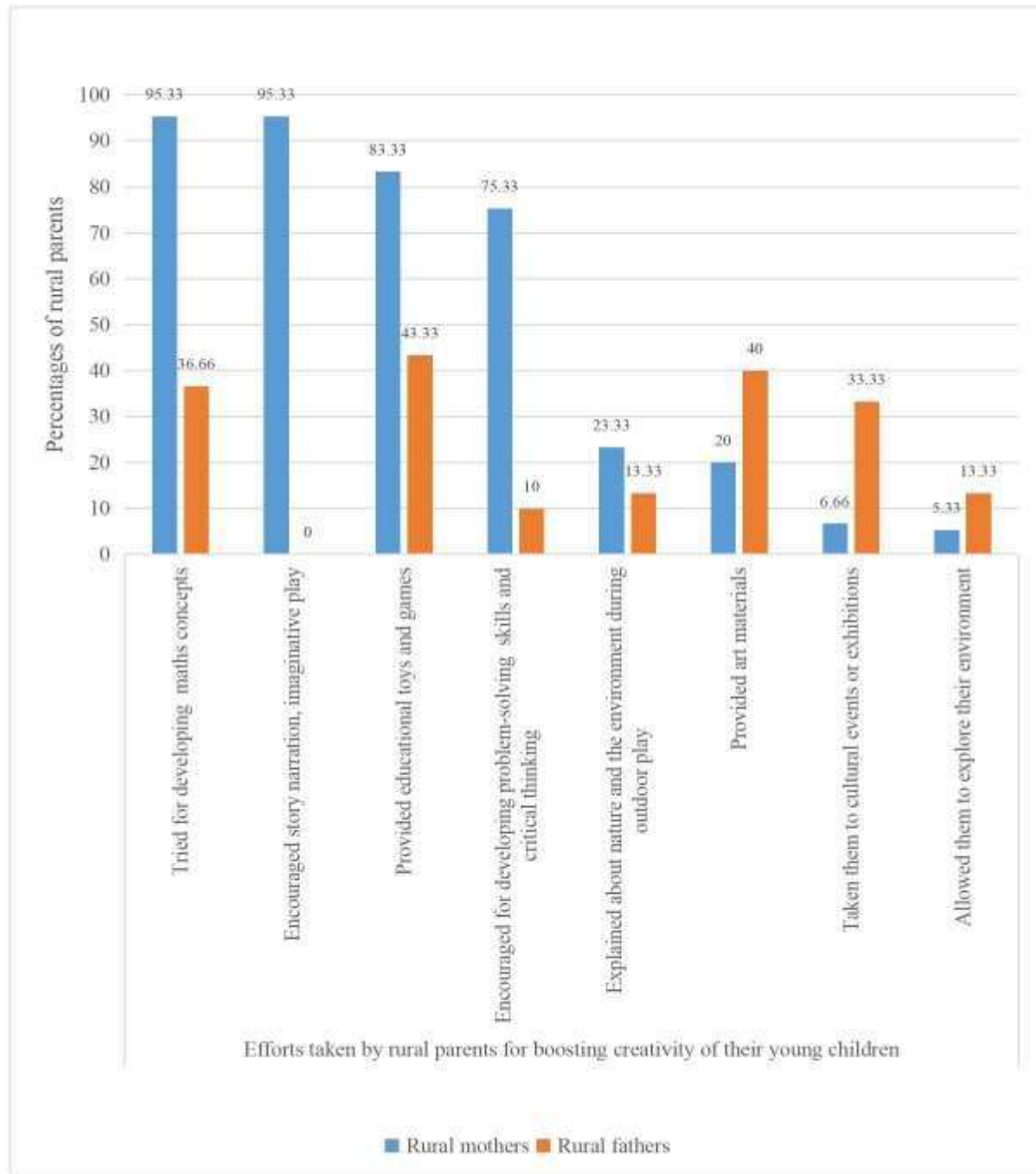


Fig. 2 Efforts taken by rural parents for boosting creativity of their young children

Table 4 and Fig 3 illustrates about various aspects considered by rural parents while selecting play material for their young children, which is categorized based on the various practices. Durable materials that can sustain were selected by all (100%) the rural mothers and (85%) of rural fathers. The safety of play materials was prioritized by rural mothers (100%) and rural fathers (93.33%). Majority (98.33%) of the rural mothers and (70%) rural fathers favored child-friendly materials respectively.

In terms of age appropriateness, it was observed that 90 per cent of rural mothers and 78.33 per cent of rural fathers selected play materials that were suitable for their young children's age. Regarding the selection based on developmental milestones, very less (5%) of rural mothers and not a single rural father adopted this practice. When considering the selection of play materials according to the young children's needs, only 1.66 per cent of rural mothers and none of the rural fathers followed this approach.

In terms of selecting play materials, based on the children's capacity and potential, only 20 per cent of rural mothers and 56.66 per cent of rural fathers adopted this practice. In summary, rural parents, generally prioritized safe, durable to sustain, child friendly ageappropriate play materials. On the whole, based on gender, highly significant differences were recorded among rural mothers and rural fathers with regard to safe, durable to sustain, child friendly age-appropriate.

These findings shed light on the diverse practices employed by rural parents in selection of play materials, emphasized the need for targeted interventions to enhance awareness and knowledge about child's development.

Table 4: Details about various aspects considered by rural parents while selecting play

	Percentages (300)	
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Selection of play material for young children by their rural parents	Rural mothers (150)	Rural fathers (150)	Z values
Safe	100.00 (150)	93.33 (140)	03.36**
Durable to sustain	100.00 (150)	85.33 (128)	05.14**
Child friendly	98.66 (148)	70.00 (105)	07.16**
Age Appropriate	90.00 (135)	78.66 (118)	02.87**
As per child's capacity and potential	20.00 (30)	56.66 (85)	06.92**
As per developmental milestones	05.00 (08)	-	-
According to need of child	01.33 (02)	21.33 (32)	05.84**

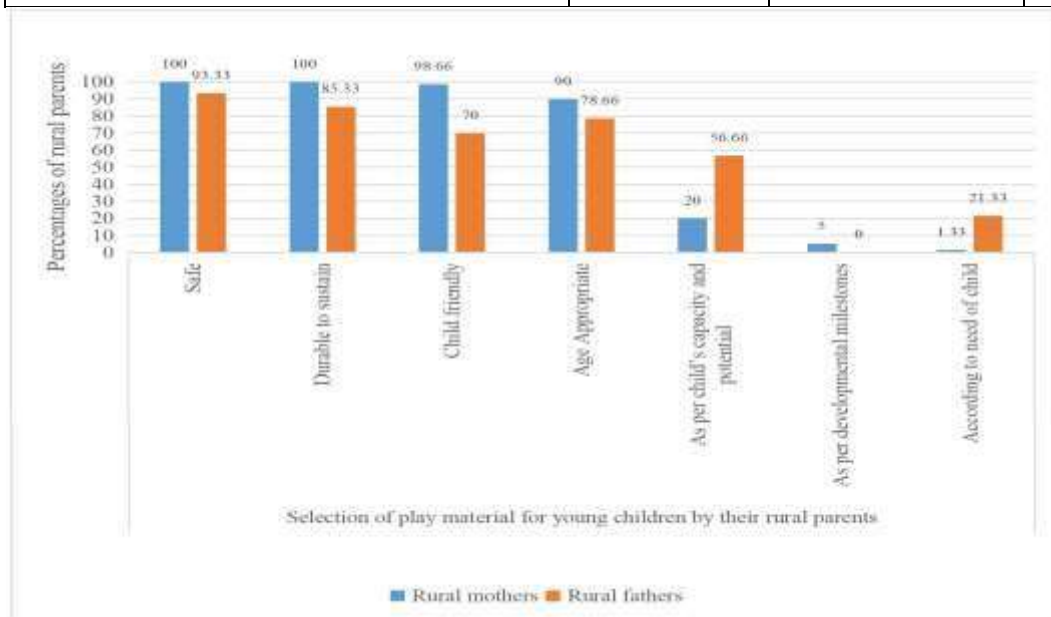


Fig 3 : Selection of play material for young children by their rural parents

Table 5 and fig 4 exhibits about the age appropriate educational play material provided by rural parents to their young children. In case of providing educational play material to their young children, majority of the rural mothers (88.33%) and (75%) rural fathers were providing soft toys to their young children followed by mobile games (71.66%) picture books (68.33%) songs and story books (66.66%) tricycles (40%), puzzles (28.33%) and charts (13.33%) by rural mothers. On the other hand, majority (93.33%) rural fathers providing picture books, followed by songs and story books (88.33%), mobile games (85%), soft toys (75%), kitchen play equipment (66.66%), tricycles (63.33%), charts (21.66%) and puzzles (20%). Not a single rural father involved in providing educational posters, musical instruments which shows less involvement of rural fathers in providing educational environment to their young children, which will adversely affects on wholesome development of their young children, on the other hand only 31.66 per cent and 03.33 per cent rural mothers were providing building blocks and musical instruments respectively to their young children. Very less percentage of rural mother (8.33%) and none of the rural father were involved in providing educational posters to their young children, while similar trend was found in case of providing building blocks, musical instruments.

On the whole statistically, no significant differences were recorded with regard to providing educational, kitchen play equipment, Tricycles and charts. Significantly higher percentage of rural fathers were providing mobile games as compared to rural mothers which throws light on casual behaviour of rural fathers, while significantly higher percentage of rural mothers were providing soft toys as compared to rural fathers. Involvement of rural fathers needs to be increased in providing age appropriate educational play materials for wholesome development of early childhood children.

Table 5: Details about the educational play materials provided by rural parents to their young children

	Percentages (300)	Z Values
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Details about the educational play materials provided by rural parents to their young children			
	Rural mothers (150)	Rural fathers (150)	
Soft Toys	88.33 (53)	53.33 (80)	07.20**
Picture books	68.66 (103)	60.00 (90)	01.45 ^{NS}
Songs and story books	66.66 (100)	46.66 (70)	04.69**
Kitchen play equipment	46.66 (70)	39.33 (59)s	01.23 NS
Tricycles	40.00 (60)	44.00 (66)	00.70 ^{NS}
Building blocks	31.33 (47)	-	-
Puzzles	28.66 (43)	20.00 (30)	01.63NS
Posters	08.66 (13)	-	-
Mobile Games	14.00 (21)	71.33 (107)	12.20**
Charts	13.33 (20)	21.33 (32)	01.85 NS
Musical instruments	03.33 (05)	-	-

Figures in parentheses indicate frequencies

**P < 0.01 level NS – Non Significant

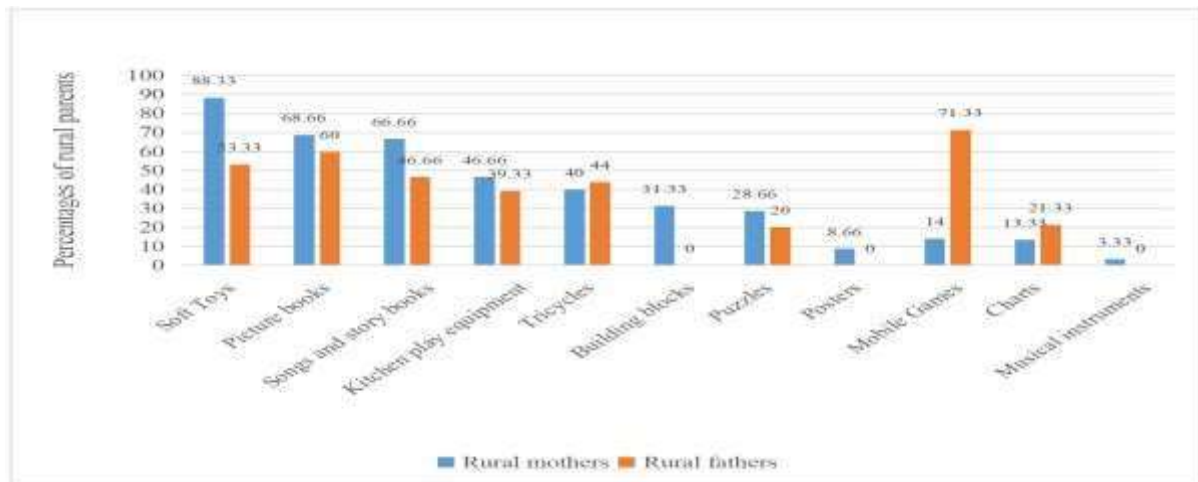


Fig.4 : Details about the educational play materials provided by rural parents for their young children

Conclusion: It is concluded that rural mothers were more involvement in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children as compared to rural fathers ,so there is a great need of execution of awareness programmes for rural fathers by Women and Child development department ,Maharashtra state to increase their involvement in providing stimulatory learning environment to their young children

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