

NATURE OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IMPARTED AT ANGANWADI CENTRE

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A large majority of children in India do not have the optimal learning condition largely due to poverty. Majority of parents are not able to give much of stimulation to their child because of their own limitation. Therefore compensatory education of these children appears to be essential if we want them to achieve well in later life (Murlidharan, 1984). The Integrated Child Development Services aims to begin at the very beginning that is even before the child is born. The programme continues to be the world's most unique early childhood development programme, which is being satisfactorily operated since four decades of its existence. ICDS main aim is to cultivate desirable attitude, values, behavior pattern in children. It takes care of children through informal ways, helps them in moulding proper habit and aids in mental development. It also paves smooth passage of the child into formal education at school (Upadhyay, 1999). The programme provides package of services to children and preschool education is one of the component of services of scheme (NIPCCD, 2006). Under the scheme preschool education activities are to be organized for children in 3 to 6 years age group. The intention is not to impart formal learning and teach 3Rs but to develop in the child desirable social attitude, values and provide environmental stimulation. There is flexibility in the programme content and methods, and the child is to be encouraged and stimulated to grow at his own pace, (Upadhyay, 1999). Through ICDS 12.5 million children in the age group of 3 to 6 years of age group from underprivileged sections are participating in centre-based early learning activities (Shabnam, 2003). Early learning component of ICDS is a significant input for providing a sound foundation but due to lack of material and other facilities some aspects of development are neglected. The dependency of AWWs upon non-indigenous play equipment is to be minimized. Emphasis on improvisation of preparation of material from local resources is required so as to raise the status of preschool education including training of AWWs

in this component (Pandey 2005). It was found in a study that children in the anganwadi have less knowledge about the different shapes, parts of body, poems and could hardly count numbers. Creative and fine-muscle development activities were grossly neglected due to lack of such facilities and also of poor and least interest of AWW to conduct different developmental related activities in a holistic manner (Malviya et al., 1999). Non-availability of play and learning material was a major constraint. Children in the national study did not perform well on the identification of colours and the other cognitive task. Emphasizing the need for creative and cognitive activities as an integral part of the preschool education. Community participation was also weak link in the ICDS programme (Sharma, 1992).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY- The methodological framework for the present study is as under..

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE: The sample for the present study comprised 60 AWWs selected from four districts of Kashmir division. Four districts were selected randomly, by lottery method. From each district, 15 AWCs were selected randomly and from each anganwadi one worker was selected with the purpose to know the nature of preschool education imparted at anganwadi centre. Sample was selected through the use of random and purposive sampling technique.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: The tool used for data gathering in the present study was a self-devised interview schedule. Both open and close ended questions were included and the schedule was pretested on sample of 20 AWWs. After preliminary analysis certain alterations were made and some more questions about preschool education and its related aspects were included so as to get in-depth information and assess the actual functioning of AWCs with regard to preschool education.

DATA ANALYSIS: The data was analyzed through content analysis. Tabulation and calculation

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of percentage was also carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION-The results of the study are presented under the following heads:

1:INFRASTRUCTURE-Physical setup: The gathered information from the AWWs reveals that all AWCs were housed in a rented building and had only one room facility where they carried out all the activities related to preschool education and other referral services, there is no separate room as a classroom. Majority of the rooms of centers had 10x12' feet area and children did not get much of space to play indoor games freely as the room was also occupied with supplementary storage materials. Doors and windows are also not constructed according to the height of children. The AWCs mostly used harsh Dari (mat/rug) for the sitting purpose instead of providing wooden or plastic furniture that would be more comfortable for the children. It was seen by the investigator that few anganwadis (25%) had proper ventilation and light arrangement whereas rest of them had average and no such facility in a room. The findings also depict that only 26% of anganwadi centre had play ground facility where the children were involved in different forms of play, maximum centers had playground in a grassy areas and rest of AWCs had cemented surfaces for play. The data from the above table reflect that all AWCs (100%) did not have any provision of wash area but as far as the toilet were concerned few of the centers 26.6% had the facility and the remaining 73% were deprived of this essential facility. It was observed by the investigator that there was no fan facility available at AWC but as far as the heating arrangement was concerned only 8.3% of centre had this provision. The main motive was to provide this facility in winter to children.

Table no:1 AMENITIES AT ANGANWADI CENTRES

TOILET FACILITY	Number of AWCs	PERCENTAGES(%)
YES	16	26.6
NO	44	73.3
TOTAL	60	100
WASH AREA		
YES	-	-
NO	60	100
TOTAL	60	100
FAN FACILITY		
YES	-	-
NO	60	100
TOTAL	60	100
HEATING FACILITY		
YES	5	8.3
NO	55	91.6
TOTAL	60	100

2:AVERAGE TIME SPENT AT AWCs FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

-It was found from the gathered data that majority of centers (36%) spent one hour for preschool education like counting, reading, identification of things and matching objects etc, and one hour for indoor and outdoor games including distribution of food also. The workers used local dialect while imparting preschool education so that the children understood things easily. The education was imparted through the use of teaching aids like charts, magnetic slates, counting bead ,self-made matching objects,books etc.By using all such teaching aids children learnt different concepts like,colour, counting, alphabetical, numerical, identification of things and sorting. Children showed interest when they were involved in using such teaching aids to learn by themselves. Learning by books made the children more curious to think and differentiate the things. Children showed more eager attitude towards matching activity and arranging the alphabets and numerals order-wise and got enjoyment out of it.It was seen by the investigator that daily time-table was planned out by the AWW in which PSE activities were arranged according to day. The investigator also noted that AWWs did not come to the centre regularly and made very less efforts to conduct preschool education in a holistic manner. It seemed that the AWWs were not much interested in performing their job and mostly had grievances related to low wages drawn.

3:AVAILABILITY OF BOOKS-The results of the gathered data reveals that only few number of anganwadi centres had provision of books in the education kit that was provided by the concerned department like alphabetical and numerals ones which could help the children to learn the things in a better way. Each child got two books per head but they were not supposed to carry these books to home.

4:ACTUAL ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN-It is seen from the gathered data that 31.6% of children attended the centre regularly and availed all the services. But as far as the observational findings of investigator were concerned the above-mentioned percentages did not remain the same in a whole week as the children attended the centre according to their own wish. Most of time it happened that they took their meals and went away. No effort was seen from the worker to attract the kids and make them curious to come and learn basic things.

5:LOW ENROLMENT AT AWC
Table no:2 REASONS FOR LOW ENROLMENT AT AWCs

Reasons	Number of AWWs	Percentages %
Lack of facilities related to preschool education	29	48
Parents negative approach towards AWC	16	26.6
Lack of infrastructure facilities	13	21.6
Chains of centres opened day by day	2	3.3
Total	60	100

The data from the above table elucidate that 48.3% of AWWs pointed that due to lack of facilities related to preschool education like play and teaching material, stationary and other necessary item which the children needed at this stage there was a low enrollment rate in the AWCs. 26.6% of workers mentioned that negative approach of parents towards such centres effect the enrolment and attendance of children. As the parents mostly considered the anganwadi as "Bread Centre" where they went to avail the nutrition facility only. 21.6% of workers said that lack of infrastructure is also one of the reason which hampered the children interest towards AWC and the remaining number visualized that as chain of AWCs are opened day by day parents also get more options to admit a child at better centre which have more facilities as compared to other.

6:Non-FOLLOWING SYALLBUS AT AWC
Table no-3 REASONS FOR NON-FOLLOWING SYALLBUS

Reasons	Number of AWWs	Percentages %
Non-formal method are followed which has no set syllabus	24	40
Develop basic concepts in play-way	32	53.3
Education is imparted according to mood and interest	4	6.6
Total	60	100

The verbal and written data gathered from the AWWs reveals that AWCs did not follow or had any prescribed syllabus till date. All the workers gave different reasons regarding non-application of

syllabus at AWCs. Majority of the workers (53.3%) mentioned that AWC children were taught through play way method to learn basic concepts and help them to go ahead. They also added up that AWCs are meant for poor sections of children who could not afford high expenditure of other schools. 40% of workers pointed out that AWC did not follow any syllabus as they imparted education in a non-formal way without any fixed time table and curriculum and rest of the number reasoned out that most of the time education was conducted according to mood and interest of children and as such no force was imposed on them.

7: CONDUCT OF GROUP ACTIVITIES—It was found from the data that all the AWWs engaged the children in group activities only, no or little attention was paid to solitary activities. Majority of the workers mentioned that children become social when they get along with each other and cultivate sharing habits in group. The workers also reasoned out that children learn from each other and show participative behavior when other children play and finish the activity quickly. By continuous communication with the peer group they develop good vocabulary and overcome hesitation.

8: ECD ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT AWC—According to the written and verbal data gathered from the anganwadi workers it was found that 31.6% of centers conducted some of the early childhood education activities in a routine manner for example story-telling, free conversation, counting, indoor and outdoor games. Where as rest of the AWCs conducted multiple activities for the children.

Table no 4 DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT AWC

Cognitive Activities	Number of AWC	Percentage
Sorting/matching Objects	30	50
Counting and seriation	7	11.6
Counting only	18	30
all of the above	5	8.3
Total	60	100
Language Activities		
picture reading and describing objects	14	23.3
Describing objects and naming and identification of pictures	18	30
Combination of above	28	46.6
Total	60	100
Fine, muscle activity		
Yes, matching objects activity	32	53.3
No	28	46.6
Total	60	100

Data from the table no 4 reflects that 50% of AWCs engaged the children in two cognitive related

activities on regular basis i-e counting and matching objects where as remaining number showed variation in conducted above mentioned activities. 46.6% of AWC conducted some of the language related activities regularly like, picture reading, describing objects and naming and identification of pictures that would help to improve language among children and some anganwadi centres paid same focus to conduct all such activities and to include other related activities which would help to enhance language aspect.

CONCLUSION-Children in India form a large and significant percentage of the total population. A vast majority of them live in impoverished economic, social and environmental conditions which impede their physical and mental development. Preschool years are crucial from the point of child development. Development in early years is very rapid and the surrounding environment creates a deepest impact on the children when his development is at its fastest. Preschool child is highly receptive to all that prevails in his environment (Murlidharan, 1984). Preschool centres have become every ones concern especially in the context of its crucial role in child's all-round development and access to elementary education. ICDS is the sole major programme with almost universal coverage of the anganwadis. The anganwadi makes an establishing link with the elementary school so that the child moves from anganwadi to the school with the necessary emotional and mental preparation (Upadhyay, 1999). The findings of the present study indicate that AWCs were housed in a rented building and had only one room facility where they carried out all the activities related to preschool education and other referral services. It was found from the data that mostly the AWCs were without toilet, bathroom and play ground facility which are the basic amenities of physical setup and for the wholesome growth and development of children. These findings are corroborated with the findings of the study conducted by Swaminathan, 1993 that anganwadi mostly lack the essentials which are important for optimal development like good building, safe playground and teaching material which prove fruitful in giving better start in

early years. The present study reveals that AWC did not follow or had any prescribed syllabus as the non-formal method were applied to learn basic concepts and duration were totally flexible so that the children got enough to learn and be master of any activity. Findings are supported with the results of the study conducted by NIPCCD, 2006 this study also found that programme content of preschool education at AWC are largely organized in a play –based manner so that the children attend anganwadi with interest and develop desirable attitude by way of providing intellectual simulation through non-formal method rather being involved in formal learning process. The nature of the preschool education activities is totally flexible to create fun learning atmosphere to the children. Findings reveal that AWCs spent only two hours in a whole day on preschool education. It is amply clear from the results that children did not get much exposure to other ECD activities as the two hours duration was not sufficient to learn all the necessary concepts. It was found that less percentage of children attended the AWC regularly due to lack of facilities and also because of parents negative approach towards centre. Majority of AWCs mentioned that mostly the parents consider it as a bread centre” where they went to avail nutrition facility only, but as far as the observational findings are concerned it was noted that workers did not make any effort to strengthen the preschool component and utilize the knowledge in a better way. Findings are supported with the study conducted by Deulkar, 1990 that time spent on preschool education was very low and participation of children was not regular and punctual. Efforts by AWCs were not effective to conduct preschool education.

SUGGESTIONS: • AWCs must aware the parents and community members regarding the concept, need and importance of preschool education so that they show interest in sending the children to anganwadi centre. • To improve the overall quality of preschool education, orientation courses for anganwadi workers must be organized by the concerned department. • The timing schedule for the anganwadi centre should be properly planned. The duration of centre must be increased so that children get enough time to learn and play.

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