

EFFECT OF DISABILITY ON PARENT CHILD INTERACTION AND CHILD REARING PRACTICE IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Child rearing practice in family varies with the kids' developmental nature. Children with special needs receive substantial care but fail to draw necessary attention required for their natural and ultimate development. This study looked into the caring pattern of children in family whether having any disability or not. Significant difference is observed in care giving nature between the children having disability and without disability. Parents spend more time, energy and money for the development of their non-disabled children. Parental attitude toward development and prospect of children was also found more favourable in case of non-disabled children than the disabled ones.

INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Though there is no accurate statistics of disability in Bangladesh yet it is estimated by different quarters that nearly 10% of total population suffer from various disabilities in their lifetime. If this number is assumed to be correct than nearly half of them belong to the school age population which is not less than 5 million in absolute number. There are very few organizations in Bangladesh which provide educational support to a very insignificant number of this population. The mainstream schools neither have the intention to enroll these unfortunate children nor have the capacity to educate them. The few organizations who work in this area largely render medical and therapeutic services with minimum educational inputs. Along with therapies overall educational development of disabled children is important for their survival and contribution to the society.

Educating disabled children is relatively new in Bangladesh. Teachers as well as parents have little understanding about disability and their education. Amongst disability mental retardation (MR) has been a special kind which deserves special attention. Neither the main stream school nor the special education programme has the capacity to provide individualized educational support to a person who is unable to cope with regular environment. Except one or two special schools, educational approaches are mostly conventional and support services are limited. Larger teacher student ratio, absence of effective special education programmes and insufficient support services have

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been the dominant factors in the sector of disability services and education. Moreover, large numbers of parents are financially incapable and are unable to send their disabled children to a special school or support their development in proper way in order to utilize their services (whatever it is) in the community.

Disability is neither a disease nor a hindrance in the process of development of individual rather it is a condition which demands appropriate coping strategy for survival. Neither the family of disabled nor the community has the means and resources to nurture them up to a satisfactory level and set them independent. However, under such circumstances it becomes necessary for the parents to understand their children irrespective of their disability and gender. The parents who have both able and disabled children distinguish them for their abilities and nurture them differently though they live in the same environment. Therefore, how the parents interact with their normal children as well as children with disability is a special interest of this investigation.

General objectives

General objective of the study is to determine the interactive behaviour pattern of the parents for their children with normal abilities as well as children with any type of disabilities.

The specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To determine the differences in interactive behaviours between parents and their children with disabilities and normal children.
- To determine the parental attitude towards child rearing and development of their children with disabilities and normal children.
- To analyze the activities of children they are engaged with and compare them between the children disability and normal children.

Significance and literature review

Children suffering from disability in families are largely abandoned to their fates; they neither can afford proper education nor find appropriate place to go for assistance. This study will provide understanding about parent-child interaction in the family and their possible intervention for children's development. Lot of research has been done in the field of parental influence for children's development. The importance of parental influence on children's development was mentioned by Rousseau and John Lock long ago. Freud also emphasized on various aspects of nurturing children from their early childhood in his theory of Psychoanalysis.

Differences in family attitudes, actions, and support result in variations in how children with special developmental needs will adjust to education or cope

with their special conditions. Thus, it is essential to consider familial and social variables, in addition to assessing a child's developmental profile for better understanding of what has happened to them in their family life before they enter a school, or even what is happening in their life now beyond the school environment (Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 1993).

When a child is first diagnosed with having a serious disability, most parents feel shock and then denial, guilt, anger and sadness before they finally adjust (Peterson, 1987). Sometimes parents react with severe depression (Farber, 1959; Bristol, Gallagher & Schopler, 1988). Many move through a type of grieving process, as though their child had died (Farber, 1986), and they may wish to share their experience with others. This common sharing of problems is the basis for forming relationships with parents experiencing similar situations. Parents' groups, composed of parents of children with similar disabilities, have been quite effective in helping new parents by sharing how they have coped with these problems.

There is a second and quite different crisis faced by many parents of exceptional children is the problem of providing daily care for their child. The child who has cerebral palsy or other developmental disability is often difficult to feed, dress, and put to bed. It is the continual, day by day responsibilities for care that often weigh families down and require sympathetic professional attention. The realization that their child will not go through the normal developmental process or may never become an independent adult often weighs heavily on the parents. Therefore how parents react with their able and disabled children in the family is a function of their attitude and feeling towards ability and disability.

When a child with disabilities is added to a family, the members' responsibilities grow larger. Other than the responsibilities additional expense, the time, and the energy needed to care for the child make the everyday tasks more critical. The extra concern for the child's safety; the difficulty of helping the child develop a good self-image and social skills; and the problems of seeing that the child receives an appropriate education all thrust upon the parent, particularly to the mother. So having a special child in family means many ordinary tasks become more difficult and more stressful.

When there is a child with disabilities in the home, fathers generally do not come to the aid of mothers by increasing their presence, help around the house, or care of the child (Gallagher & Bristol, 1988). The father may get a second job to help pay for the additional expenses and as a consequence, not be in the home very much at all. A mother who thinks that this is an appropriate and loving thing to do accepts this behaviour. Another mother might see that same behaviour by the father as a device for avoiding the problem and dodging responsibility, and may be quite unhappy in that situation. This study will throw light upon the division of labours that a mother and father provide for a child with disability.

Education for disabled children in Bangladesh is a neglected domain, there are a few organizations who work with disabled people and provide education to them. We could not find any study that has shown a systematic approach of teaching disabled children in school. A few schools that provide education to disabled children serve only the well to do families. Children from poor families with any special needs are largely excluded from mainstream school so they have no other alternative to education. Thus there exists an inverse relationship between education and disability. Recent UNESCO study suggests that only 1-2% of children with disabilities in developing countries receive education (DFID, 2000). Another study recently conducted by CSID (Center for Services and Information on Disability) also reflects that the literacy rate of children with disabilities, in un-served areas where no intervention programmes exist for the people with disabilities, is only 4% (CSID, 2002). These facts finally put the responsibility of education of any disabled child to his/her own parents or family.

METHOD

This study was conducted in six willing elementary schools of Dhaka city selected purposively; of which two were special schools, three were regular schools and one was combined. The data were collected in mid 2004 by the researchers with the help of a research assistant. In order to get the information on parent child relation only 66 willing mothers were interviewed. Among these mothers 33 had children with some kind of disability while another 33 mothers had children with normal ability. About 25% of all the mothers had children of both kinds.

Three set of instruments were used for data collection such as; (a) questionnaire for mothers – consisting of questions on their socio-economic status, behaviour with children and various supports provided to these children; (b) children's activity based record sheet; and finally (c) a test of attitude of parents' towards their children's development. The questionnaire and activity based record sheets were filled in by the investigators through interview and the attitude test was given to the mothers to fill it in by themselves.

All the instruments were developed on a priori basis by the researchers and shown to the experts for their comments and finalized. Due to shortage of time fund constraints the instruments were not been field tested.

RESULTS

About 80% of the mothers interviewed were moderate to highly educated having college and university degrees. Their average age was over 31 years and in this respect mothers of both the groups were similar. Their average family size (including parents) was little over five (5.6 for families without disabled children and 5.3 for families with disabled children). All the mothers were interviewed by keeping a target child in view, who was enrolled in school and his/her age was within 15 years irrespective of their ability. Their average age is given in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Average age and range of age of the children targeted for study.

Type of ability	Boys	Girls	Both
Disabled (n = 33)	8.18 (6 – 12)*	9.60 (3 – 14)	9.02 (3 – 14)
Able (n = 33)	5.90 (3 – 10)	5.70 (1 – 11)	5.90 (1 – 11)

* Figures in parentheses indicate age range.

The above table shows that the disabled children come to school late compared to their able counterparts.

Children in families, particularly where both the parents are working, stay with care givers. In this respect how many of the children had full time care giver were examined and found that large number of children in able group had full time care giver than the disabled group of children (Figure 1).

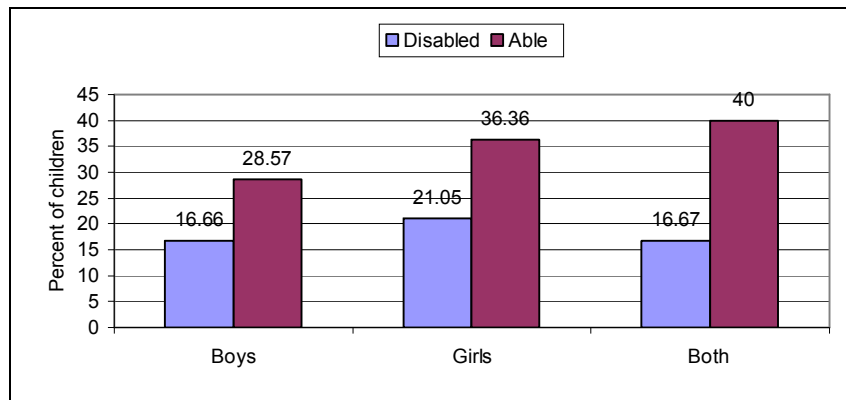


Figure 1. Percentage of children having full time care givers other than their mothers.

It reveals from the above figure that families take less care for their disabled children compared to their able children in the family. About 17% children have a full time care giver at home while 40% of the children with normal

ability have full time care giver at home. This indicates that parents do not consider their disabled children to be important for their future. Through these parents put their children to school for development and the able children attend school at least a year earlier (4.92) than the disabled children (5.99). Gender wise variation indicates that girls go to school little earlier than the boys.

Parent's contribution to child development

Children require parental attachment at home but it is not equally available from them. Mothers give more time to their younger children than father. Following figure 2 provides the detail of their time giving to children.

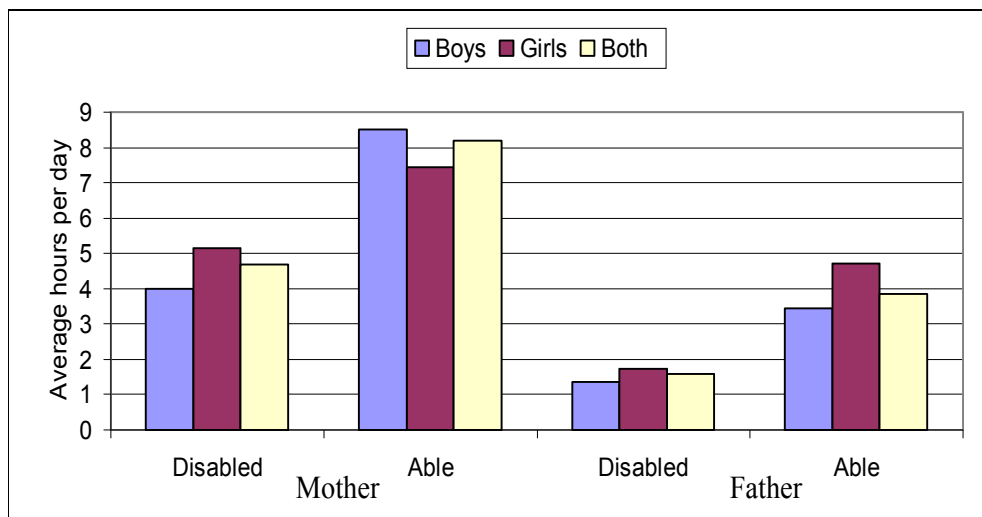


Figure 2. Average hour per day spent for children by the parents.

The figure given above indicates that parents provide more time to their able children than the disabled children. Fathers in both the cases provide less time for their children compared to their mothers. On an average a mother gives over eight hours (8.15) time for her able child while she provides only less than 5 hours (4.70) to her disabled child. Compared to this picture, father provides 3.58 and 1.60 hours for his able and disabled child respectively.

Compared to this picture, it was evident that other members of the family who take care of children also provide less time to their disabled children. Here in this case they give at least half time to care disabled children (Figure 3). Gender wise variation shows that girls get little more time in both cases than their boys counterparts. However in all cases family members other than parents also provide less time to the disabled children than the children with normal ability.

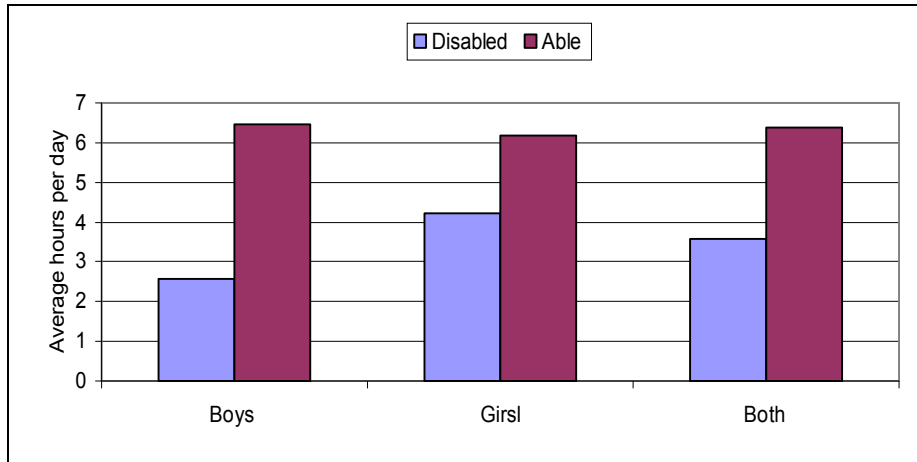


Figure 3. Average hour per day spent for children by other family members.

Material support to children

Play materials, books, dress etc. are very much required for the normal development of children but in this respect also it was found that disabled children face greater disparity than the children with normal ability.

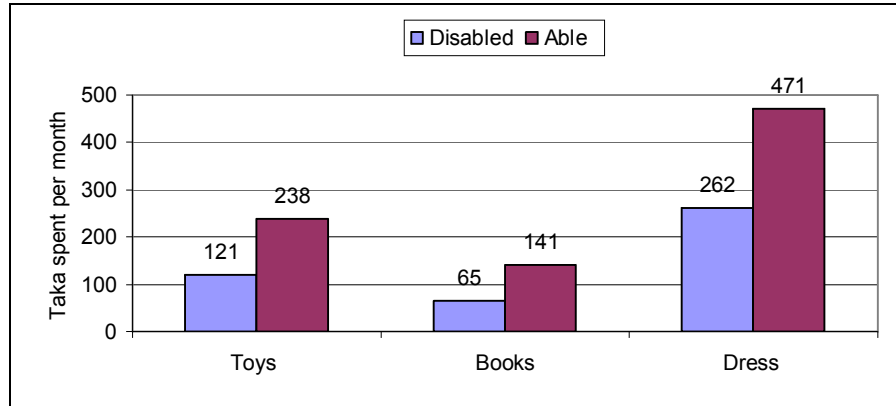


Figure 4. Average monthly expenditure made for children on various accounts.

The above figure shows that parents spend far less amount on various account for their disabled children compared to their children with normal ability. This figure clearly indicates that parents do not consider their disabled children worthwhile for any aspect, so they disregard their demands in the face of development.

Attitude towards child development

It is quite natural that parents have preference of one child over the others; but how far the preference is visible in case able-disable children were measured by using an attitude scale. This scale was developed to measure mothers' attitude towards child rearing and his/her development. This was a Likert type five point scale test developed by the researchers. The test was pre-tested and validated with expert opinion. Mothers were asked to fill in the attitude scale keeping one of her targeted child (enrolled in school irrespective of his/her ability) in view. Their attitude towards child rearing and developing is given in the following figure 5.

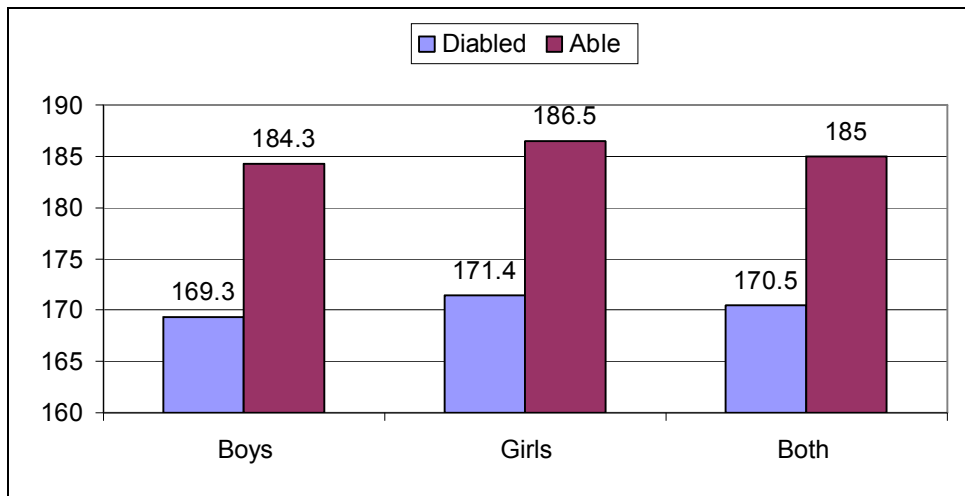


Figure 5. Mothers' score on attitude towards child development and rearing practice.

Considering children's disability mothers have very unfavourable attitude towards their development. According to this figure mothers think that their disabled children will not be able to grow independently and they are to some extent unproductive for the family and always dependent on others. Parents also consider children with normal ability are productive and will give service to them in their old age. There is little gender variation in terms of mothers' attitude; mothers have some higher favourable attitude towards their girls than boys irrespective of their abilities.

Children's daily activity

In order to analyze children's daily activities a time bound record sheet was used and most of the activities from 6:00 am to 12:00 midnight were recorded. The record sheet had a list of 20 daily activities that a child may undertake during the day. The list consisted of sleeping, eating, playing, remain under care, watching TV, study etc. The whole 18 hours time was divided into six blocks consisting of three hours each. The mother had to recall each activity underwent yesterday and mention it in terms of minutes. So, in each time

block the child may perform several activities at a time, therefore, the summative active time may exceed over three hours. However, such recording of time may contain over or under reporting but it is assumed that while averaging the effect of reporting would be rounded up. In this study only the major activities have been reported (Figure 6). It shows that in day to day essential activities there is little difference between the normal and disabled children except one i.e., care giving. Such as in sleeping and feeding children with normal abilities get more time from their family than the children with disabilities. However, children with normal abilities receive twice as much care as the disabled children. Though very little time is indicated yet, the disabled children are left alone to their own selves twice as much as the normal children.

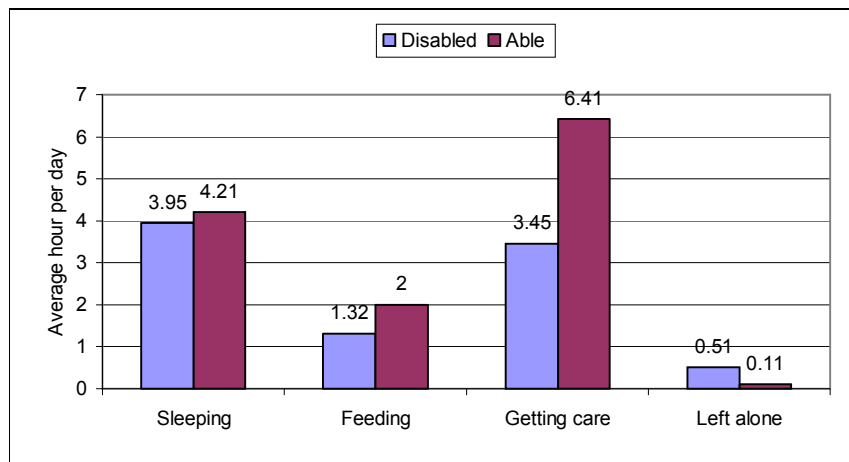


Figure 6. Average hour spent per day for some basic activities of a child.

So the above figure demonstrates that the children with disability have less interactive time than the children with normal abilities.

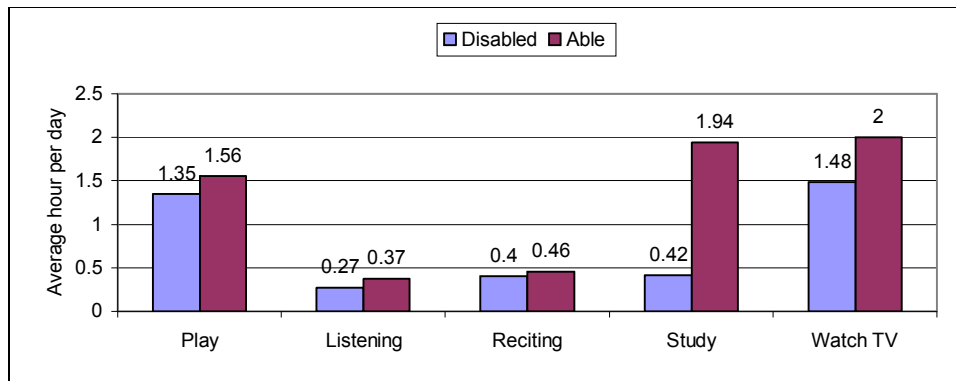


Figure 7. Average hour spent per day for some other activities of a child.

Time taken for other activities like play, listening stories, reciting, study, watching TV etc. are indicated in figure 7. This figure shows that children

irrespective of their abilities get very short time for the above mentioned important activities. For example children spend only around one and half hours per day for playing. The situation with listening and reciting children spend only very insignificant time, i.e., about 15 to 20 minutes per day. Able children spend only about two hours for study but on the other hand the disabled children spend less than half hour per day for study. Mothers also indicated that children with disability spend some less time for watching TV than the children with normal abilities. However, in all respect disabled children are always under treated compared to their normal siblings.

DISCUSSION

Rearing children in an effective way is a very important function for a family. It is commonly understood that all children irrespective of their abilities are equally important to parents but due to their birth order, gender or difference in abilities parents tend to distinguish them to some extent. This study highlighted some aspects of parental distinction in case of children having some kind of disabilities. There is a common belief that disabled children are the burden of the family and they are unproductive in society and therefore, parents have a tendency to look down upon them and devoid them of their rights. This study has the indication that though parents do not outright neglect their disabled children yet, knowingly or unknowingly, they are little indifferent about their well being.

A child with disability, of any kind, requires additional attention from parents; need extra care for their development and more materials to interact with. Unfortunately this study indicates the opposite. Disabled children require more effective time from care giver, particularly from parents; they should be encouraged equally for their food, clothing, play, interaction and study. Unless they receive equal attention as the children with normal abilities they would not be able to grow and develop as productive citizen.

Parental attitude towards child rearing and development varies according to the children's intellectual and physical abilities. The more a child suffers form disability the attitude towards that child would be more unfavourable. Parents in fact are not aware of this unfavourable attitude towards their disabled child. Knowledge of such attitude would be helpful for them to modify their behaviour. Unless the attitudinal change is brought in among the parents the psychological, emotional and social support to the child with disability would not be of great help. It should be emphasized here that having a child with disability is not a result of any sin rather it is a natural incident and caused form various avoidable psychological and environmental hazards. Apparently, this study would help teachers and parents to demonstrate the effect of the disability on parents and lead them to overcome the problem.

Analysis of daily activities of children clearly demonstrates the fact that disabled children suffers form less interaction with family members. But in

order to help disabled children to grow and adjust in society, they need maximum interaction with both family members and surrounding materials. Children with disability particularly with intellectual disability require more materials and psychological support for their better development. Looking at the findings of this study teachers and parents may draw their child rearing plan for optimal benefit.

Long term plan is required for child rearing practice. When there is a child born with disability and he/she is accepted with positive attitude then much of the tension could be removed through proper planning and right actions. Parents and teachers should equally emphasized on the children with disability and children with normal ability. There should have equal opportunity for both of them to rear up together, educate together and bloom-up at a time with their own limitations and prospect.

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