

# Child Care Practices and Nutritional Status of the Children of Working and Non-Working Mothers in Selected Area of Dhaka City

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## Introduction

In Bangladesh about 49 percent of the population are women<sup>1</sup> and women specially in the muslim families traditionally perform house hold activities<sup>2</sup>. The trend now has been changing. Society is increasingly demanding that women should work outside home and contribute to the welfare of the family as well as to the society<sup>3,4</sup>. So the number of women in the job market are continuously increasing<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, mothers are not able to spare full time on child care. So womens' participation in the job market may pose serious hindrance to the child care unless a proper planning takes in<sup>6,7</sup>.

In Bangladesh about 29 percent of our population are literate<sup>8</sup>. Amongst them, only few fortunate women have access to higher education and a small segment of them constitute mothers. Many of these mothers are engaged in various development efforts of non-government organisations<sup>9</sup>. The remaining educated women remain as housewives and take care of their children and manage household activities. It is thus vitally important to study whether the children of working mothers are being deprived of mothers care or not. Present study deals with this issue. The study

population thus consists of both working and non-working mothers and the study was conducted between January and June, 1993.

## Methods

*Selection of the study sample:* The study was done on a sample of 50 working mothers (W.M.) and 50 non-working mothers (N.W.M.) of different income groups. Fifty respondents who consented to participate in the study were initially listed having educational qualification either graduation or post-graduation and were engaged in service. Afterwards another fifty respondents were selected with similar level of education but they were only housewives. The study was carried out at Gopibagh area in Dhaka City.

The respondents included teachers, health professionals, and officials from government and semi-government organisations. Amongst them, there were 6 health professionals, 28 govt./ semi-govt. officials and 16 teachers having various levels of education. The other 50 non-working mothers were engaged in household activities.

The collection of the data was undertaken through home visits using a prescribed & pretested questionnaire. Each respondent was questioned about her

child care practices and her responses were noted accordingly on the questionnaire. Each interview was undertaken on preset scheduled time. The weight and height measurements of the children were taken as per standard procedure prescribed by Jellife<sup>10</sup>. The collected information were then compiled and tabulated according to the objective set for the study. The NCHS reference standard was used while comparing the weight and height of the children of the working and non-working mothers and a cut-off point for malnourishment was assumed.

**Results**

The study comprised of 100 mothers from both working and non-working groups. The collected information on their socio-economic status, practices of child caring and nutritional status of the children are tabulated in the following tables.

The Table-1 shows that majority of the respondents had graduation.

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents by educational qualification (N=100)

Educational Qualification	Percentage of respondents
Having graduation	54
Having post-graduation	46

The Table-2 shows that the mean age of the last child of working mothers was greater than that of non-working mothers. Again the mean family size of non-working mothers was higher than the working mothers. This may be due to the fact that working mothers were more concious regarding keeping their family size smaller. This table also shows that no high difference in terms of family expenditure exists within this two groups. The mean monthly family income of working mothers was 22% more than that of non-working mothers. However, the difference in the mean income and expenditure of non-working mothers shows that they were having slightly negative balance.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the respondents by Age of the last child, family size, monthly income and expenditure (N=100)

Mothers	Mean Age of the last child (in Months)	Family size (Mean)	Income in Tk. (Mean)	Expenditure in Taka (Mean)
Working	39.5	5.4	8520	7500
Non-working	33.0	6.1	7000	7530

**Table 3.** Distribution of the working mothers by education and by occupation (N=100)

Occupation	Number of Mothers	Level of Education	
		Graduation	Post-graduation
Health Professionals	6	4	2
Govt/Semi-Govt. Officials	28	16	12
Teachers	16	2	14

Among the working mothers, the percentage of Government or Semi-government officials was higher. However, this officials included various

categories of employees and officers. Teachers working either with government institution or private institutions are categorized broadly as teachers.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the respondents by providing their children types of breakfast food and milk feeding practices.

Item	Working mothers	Non-working
	(N=50) percentage	mothers (N=50) percentage
Artificial milk	64	44
Breast milk	4	16
Preparation with rice, wheat, egg, pulses as well as vegetables	84	80
Fruits	12	4
Feeding with cup and spoon	64	36
Feeding with commercial feeders	36	64

This Table shows that children of the working mothers received more milk than of non-working mothers. Again mixed food items which included various types of preparation of rice and wheat along with egg and pulses as well as vegetables were also consumed relatively more among the children of working mothers. Furthermore breast feeding

was also continued by 16% of non-working mothers compared to 4% working mothers. Because of more exposure to modern information the working mothers practised lesser use of commercial feeder than the non-working mothers. As such 64% of working mothers used cup and spoon feeding.

**Table 5** Distribution of respondents regarding children's spending of time with other family members (N=100)

Time spent with Family members	Working mothers (Percentage)	Non-working mothers (Percentage)
Mother	60	60
Father	64	52
Sister	4	4
Brother	0	4
Domestic helper	28	8

It is seen from the Table that husbands of the working mothers spent more time for caring their children against the non-working mothers. The working mothers were dependent more on domestic helpers. This domestic help

included performing personal cleanliness, bathing, dressing, helping in studies of the children etc. The study also showed that 92% husbands of both categories of respondents extended co-operation in domestic works.

**Table 6.** Percent distribution of respondents by the possession of toys for their children (N=100)

Items	Working mothers %	Non-working mothers %
Dolls	36	35
Crookeries	24	16
Cars	52	52
Birds and animals	20	24

There exists no appreciable difference in possession of toys between the children of two groups of mothers.

**Table-7 :** Percent distribution of children of two group of mothers by their weight and height for age (N=100)

Age in Months	Below - 2 S. D.				Between Reference and - 2 S. D.				Above Reference			
	WM		NWM		WM		NWM		WM		NWM	
	Wt	Ht	Wt	Ht	Wt	Ht	Wt	Ht	Wt	Ht	Wt	Ht
0-11	0	2	10	8	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	4
12-35	2	8	6	2	6	0	2	2	10	10	8	12
36-72	2	8	14	12	2	2	4	2	24	14	4	12

WM=Working Mother; NWM=Non Working Mother; Wt=Weight and Ht=Height.

The nutritional status of the children was assessed by anthropometric measurement of taking weight and height using NCHS cut-off point below -2SD as malnourished. It was found that 88% of malnourished children belonged to non-working mothers compared to 12% of malnourished children of working mothers, when the weight variable was considered. However considering height variable 55% of malnourished children belonged to non-working mothers compared to 45% of malnourished children of working mothers.

### Discussion

In the developing countries, it is generally assumed that the childcaring responsibilities are assigned mainly to mothers. As the socio-economic scenario is changing during recent days some of the mothers are working outside their homes. This study reveals that working mothers were more conscious about nutritional care of their children in terms

of feeding milk with spoon and cup. Their percentage was almost double than non-working mothers. This may be related to their more exposure outside home which allowed them to practise proper infant and child feeding. This practice was reflected in the number of malnourished children among non-working mothers who were seven times more than working mothers in terms of weight for age. The same trend was also found in terms of height for age. When the co-operation of the husbands regarding domestic affairs in daily child caring activities was compared, no difference was found between these two groups. This shows that even by working outside, the working women were deprived of husbands assistance for domestic help. The study highlighted the impact of working outside by the mothers on the nutritional status of the children along with other familial situation for the caring and feeding the children side by side with non-working mothers.

### Summary

A study on the child care practices and determination of nutritional status of the children of working and non working mothers were imparted during January to June 1993. This survey was conducted at Gopibagh area in Dhaka City. One hundred educated mothers were included for the study. Amongst them 50 were working mothers (WM) and 50 were non-working mothers (NWM) of different professions, various level of education and income groups. It was observed working mothers (WM) were more concious about nutritional care of their children in various aspects. About 64% of the working mothers practiced milk feeding to their children using cup and spoon while only 36% of the non-working mothers practiced the same. Malnourished children belonging to non-working mothers were 7 times more in numbers than children of working mothers.

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