

## Improve Parenting Practices and Child Development: Cases from Kaushambi, India

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### ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to understand how aware mothers are of the impact of their actions on child psychology. Descriptive statistics are used to study the lifestyle of the respondents. It is inferred that benighted mothers are ignorant about the documented research parenting practices, unlike educated mothers who have websites/ books/support groups to refer from. This participatory action research is based on experience sharing to spread knowledge. It was used to create self-help groups through mutual support. One's thought process was more streamlined and there was a noteworthy improvement in child behavior. There is a higher probability of the developments to reflect in society, in near future. Public awareness is improved. This study would augment understanding of parenting in rural societies and re-frame the health and education policies to improve the current social work and create a co-parenting club. The findings are applicable to developing economies as Bogin et. al (2014) say globalization is a social change process. This research is non-statistical as suggested by Henry et. al. (2016).

**Keywords:** *Mother, Child, Parenting Practices, Rural India, Policymakers*

India's global rank is two in terms of population and nearly half of the population is women. The country will have the highest population by the year 2027 as reported in UN's World Population Prospects. The administratively divided Indian state of Uttar Pradesh homes almost 21 million females in rural areas with a low literacy rate of 48.48% as per the 2011 census. Empowering women is a focal point in the 21st century in the broad areas of education, employment and personal needs. The children are seen as potential beneficiaries of the same. It is well documented in academic discourses that a mother is a child's first teacher. The argument that a child's personality demands good nurturing for productive adulthood is commonplace in academic discourse. The policy discourse perspective suggests that these facets remain challenged to the marginalized fringe of society. In the education sector, the inclusion of parenting augments the empowerment level of the next generation. As children are empty vessels, and 'bit by bit' parenting fills them up (Grant, 2013). This study is action research as the aim is to share parenting knowledge and empower mothers.

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The argument that a child's personality demands nurturing for productive adulthood, is commonplace in academic discourse. Conditionally, many facets of desirable attitudes have been cultivated in the parenting styles of Baumrind (1971). Basis this, the reactions of mothers vary when the same situation is replicated in different households. A child's perception of things today would decide the course of action tomorrow. Astonishingly, there are some uneducated mothers whose children are successful in professional and personal life while some children chose the wrong professional track (extreme point of view) in spite of undergoing the same parenting. Arguably, parental education may be essential for good parenting but it is not a sufficient measure. What is important here is the way a mother talks to a child, family, and other associates and how things are put across. Children learn by observing and wish to replicate things that parents do (Perry, 2019). A mother's mood may be happy, neutral, or sad but controlling emotions and mindset about things decides one's gesture toward the child. Altogether, one's individual personality gives the parental impression and teaching thereafter.

The Government of India is committed to improving the education system in India. The government is implementing safe motherhood and child schemes that are unswerving with the government's commitment to empowering women. Schemes named National Health Mission (NHM) launched in 2005 and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) launched in 1975, involve para-professionals who advocate for women daily in the rural areas and have the strongest hold on the mothers' mindsets. Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) are hired under NHM on a service basis and *Aanganwadi* (name in Hindi language meaning courtyard) are hired under ICDS on a contractual basis. These social workers have the strongest hold on the mothers' mindsets. In accordance with the government report titled *Comprehensive Training Guidelines for AWTCs and MLTCs (released in 2017)*, and *Guidelines on Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)*, the areas of training do not include detailed parenting practices in the curriculum of the teaching by the paraprofessionals. They go door to door in rural homes to take care of newly wedded daughters-in-law, pregnant women, new-born and, children up to six years of age primarily on health, nutrition, hygiene, disease prevention, contraception, newborn care, and child enrolment in schools at three years of age.

A child's developmental period between a grownup-infant and child-school-enrolment i.e. home-time of the child is being neglected in the advocacies that these women do. Mother's literacy is impactful for a child grooming during this 'home-time' that is 75% of an individual's time (Kraft & Rogers, 2014). The paraprofessionals are more or less on the same page regarding parenting because they belong to the same status according to the concerns and achievements listed in the journalist account (PNS, 2019). Current accountability mechanisms in the Indian education and health sector need restructuring. The rural mothers are unaware of the impact of their activities on child's mental health. Policies should be framed to attack the root cause of developmental gaps rather than opening choices that help achieve marriage and career milestones, in adulthood. It is crucial to understand why is the dignity of children compromised in rural areas as children are a country's future.

**Research question:** Is there enough knowledge sharing of the documented expert advice and parenting suggestions with the women?

**Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Methods are suggested for building stronger positive home environments, mother empowerment, and child development, via parenting initiatives that have been tested and verified.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Parenting styles are a reflection of beliefs and cultures. This study roots Vygotsky's sociocultural theory basis the premise that society contributes to an individual's progress. Rural societies (being of the same status) may be unable to give a near-panacea for the ills. The premise of Ecological Systems Theory about microsystem is not given due importance in terms of upbringing in uneducated families. A woman may be unaware of what is good for a family in reality.

Bradbury (2010, p.93) writes that action research is responsible for taking knowledge created by people. Contribution to practice is required along with theoretical study. Parenting programs develop a better understanding of parenting for an individual (Loizou, 2013). In view of this, several theoretical contributions and practices that are implemented, are noted with a focus on participatory action research was focussed. The Delhi government in India introduced a happiness curriculum in schools in 2019. Singh (2018) blames the household situations for suicide by children and not just academic pressure. Sharif (2015) writes that up to five years of age; parenting lays down the foundation of social and cognitive developments. A child's home associations give an outline as to the way the child will interpret the outside world. Pedagogy is associated with parenting behavior. Grant (2013) writes that theories of inertia and osmosis play a role in parenting which is widely seen as an art. Children would continue to do well in school unless some outer force is applied and are centers of less concentration which become more concentrated with exposure. Bornstein (2007) writes that individuals play an important role in the outcome of ontogeny.

Gillies (2006) mentions that marginalized mothers are a huge concern by people and yet their concerns are overlooked. Murkoff (2010) writes that grandmas often end up making a mother apprehensive and worried by saying that a child has not been able to sit by six weeks while the same is achieved at five weeks because there is stronger self-belief of being more experienced. Some rural homes may follow an authoritarian one in the formative years. In this style, the parents are more demanding and authoritative rather than responsive. Though, the authoritarian parenting style brings-forth educational success (Zahed et al, 2016). The said style causes conduct problems (Thompson et al, 2003) and is felt to be problematic by children (Niaraki, 2013). Child development is enhanced by keeping pets at home. As per Bryant (1990), there are various benefits of a child-dog relationship namely, affinity, lasting and self-enhancing affection, and, an exclusive relationship. Reading to a dog has a positive effect on behavior (Hall et al, 2016).

Jadid (2019) reports the real-life incident where two sisters in an eastern Uttar Pradesh town named *Padrauna*, chose to disguise themselves as men. The journalist account reports that they decided to work as hairstylists in their makeshift barbershop to extend financial support to the family. The customers were bothersome in letting the girls do the hairstyling as the said job is done by men mostly. After five years, when people learned this, the two sisters faced criticism from extended family members who did not support them during the times of financial crisis. Father is proud of the daughter's (two sisters) decision to support their family. In view of the finding by Pednekar(2019), rural children in India are victims of physical abuse with the rural to urban ratio being 3:2. Organized, replicable, measurable outcome programs (evidence-based), basis social learning theory, encouragement of parent-child associations, are promising strategies for lowering ineffective parenting practices and are needed in developing countries (Knerr et al, 2013 & Webster-Stratton, Herman, 2015).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is designed keeping in mind the research intention. This study is qualitative research involving in-depth and focus group interactions. It lays the foundation of primary means which will construct theoretical foundations as suggested by Morse & Field (1996), in the future.

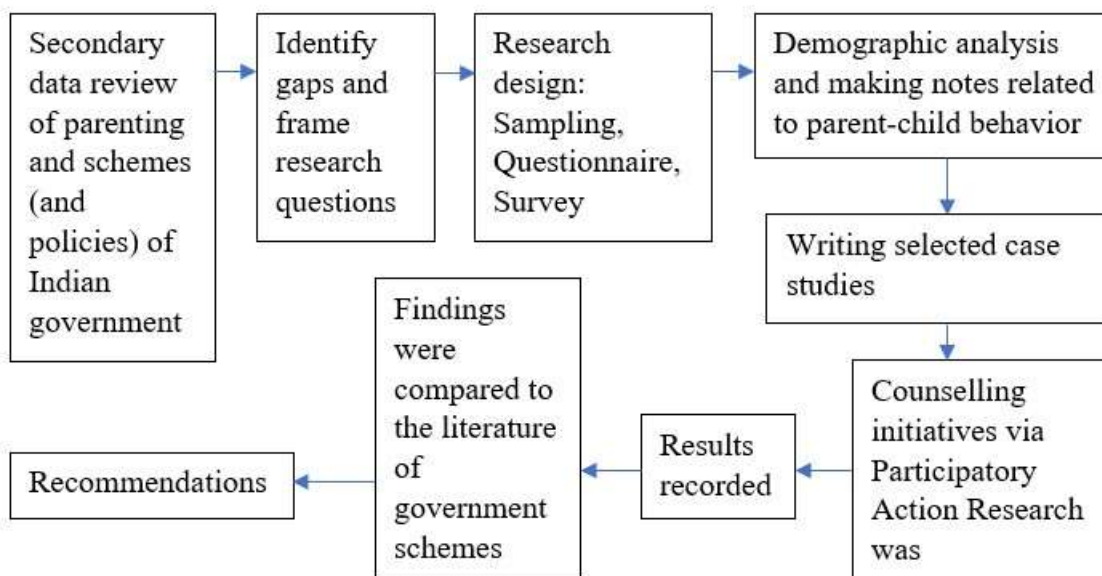
### *Design and reliability of the questionnaire*

To collect parenting knowledge from poor women, the questions are designed on a 5-point Likert scale considering the suggestions from five experts (two Accredited Social Health Activists (government scheme workers), two academicians, and one parent-instructor). The preliminary questionnaire is given in appendix I. After locating unique references through searching, this study screened 1291 married women for inclusion in research. Data is collected from 1000 respondents (77.4% mean response rate). 193 studies were available for case study analysis. The survey data was analyzed and checked for testing the reliability of the questionnaire. The value of Cronbach's (1951) alpha is 0.60028915 which makes the questionnaire appropriate for testing in the Indian context. Hair et al (2015) state that the value of alpha should equal or exceed 0.6 for the reliability measure.

### *Data collection*

The reliability of questions was ensured and the data was collected from June 2019 to August 2019. The sample was selected purposively. The families of respondents were extended and nuclear. The flow of the conversations was response-driven. More weightage is given to the qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews. Non-participant observations were made to witness a mother disciplining a child (specifically) in the household. The mother's responses were recorded to the child's activities on a day-to-day basis and considered how they have empowered post knowledge sharing and counseling sessions. Parental interactions, household environment, family communication style, and educational situation were observed. Notes of the overall personality trait in children were made which were rooted in the above-mentioned variables. This study focuses on parenting initiatives and the method is appropriate as it is based on reality. The design of the questionnaire involved interactions with social work experts in the study area. The survey was done successfully and, the women were given upbringing suggestions (appendix II) which are experiences from the author's personal learning of child upbringing after the commencement of the motherhood journey. The suggestions are drafted considering the low education level, uses of profane language, lack of rational discussions, unawareness of home-preschool, and authoritative disciplinary methods. The steps of the research are listed in figure 1 and the profile of respondents in table 1.

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*Figure 1: Representation of research steps in the study*

*Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents*

Variable	Category	Percentage
<b>Present age</b>	18-28 years	72.3
	29-39 years	25.6
	40-50 years	2.1
<b>Age when married</b>	18-22 years	72.5
	23-27 years	27.3
	28-32 years	0.2
<b>Age at the time of child bearing</b>	18-20 years	39.2
	21-25 years	51.1
	26-30 years	9.7
<b>Education</b>	NIL	12.1
	Primary	44
	Inter	22.1
	Graduate	14.7
	Post graduate	7.1
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	64.5
	Divorced	24.3
	Widow	11.2
<b>Children age</b>	0-10 years	46.7
	11-20 years	52.3
	> 20 years	1

### *Demographic analysis*

The educated women wrote the survey answers themselves. The uneducated women had a writer to do the job and some were biased because they hesitated from sharing their true responses to the writer. The average marriageable age of women is 20 years and 86% started a family after a year of marriage. Some women lack basic education. It is inferred from the families in the rural areas that there is a strong belief in seeing the neighboring homes on street as extended families. There is a significant perception of multiple parents for children

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by the families. The selected case studies listed below build a clear premise that parenting uneducated poor mothers is essential to foster cognitive development in children. The parents avoid holding discussions with children and tell the child to go away when they witness an intimate act between parents<sup>i</sup>. Parents fail to spend a good time with the child due to multiple children. In many homes, male members are the bread earners. They have alcohol problems or anger issues due to low earnings and many dependents. The children are often innocent victims. Some families had jocular views about the impactful approaches by many parents (Egg. Some families laughed when a child was taught to say 'thank you'). Systematic reviews reveal that attempts need to be made in rural contexts to scrutinize the policy framework on education and health and, the practice which is followed at the ground level.

### **Selected short cases to understand parenting practices (and child development) and develop comfort with respondents**

Majority of the mothers believe that they are doing a remarkable job by rationalising their bad actions. Child development is rooted in the affection between parent-child relationship (natural phenomena). But expressing the same is evidently a personal choice (knowledge oriented). Some short cases are listed to understand the parenting practices that are followed in certain situations.

#### ***Unpleasant cases of child upbringing***

A mother used to wake up the one-and-a-half-year-old daughter after 4 pm as it was considered a bad omen to sleep then. There were four mothers who had not purchased books for their four-year-old children because of the thought that there is nobody to educate them<sup>ii</sup>. A five-year-old child forgot to touch the feet (India's traditional practice in culture) of an elder from the extended family. This marked a huge symbol of disrespect. The mother yelled at the child and the reaction of the mother pondered over the child's mind as evident from cries (load bearing outcome). Respecting culture is taught by force in the house. Two mothers thought that they did not have enough money to educate eight children and so they did not enroll girls in school. One mother thought that there was no need for her daughter to study because the girl would be married soon and, must be trained with culinary skills only.

A four-year-old girl had a younger brother aged one year. The girl was replicating the act of breastfeeding to a toy doll by mimicking the mother. The breastfeeding act became a game for the girl because it was bringing a smile to the elder's face. The move was rationalized and the girl repeated the said activity as a game. A mother-in-law was stuttering while conversing with a one-year-old baby. There was a six-year-old boy in the same house who was also stuttering and had no medical reason associated with the speech. The doctor told them that the boy has learned the words because of hearing them (when the mother-in-law talks to the infant). In a neighborhood household, there was a mother who was uprightly refusing a sour-taste snack to her three-year-old child because of a doctor's prescription for tonsillitis. The child was rolling on the ground out of anger, and stubbornness followed by the banging of body parts on the ground. During interaction with a mother, we learned that the four-year-old daughter was suffering from fever for a month.

The family consulted four doctors and gave up on medication because switching medicines worsened the condition of the girl. They had then settled to '*Jhadphoonk*' (exorcise) done by patting leaves on the head in presence of incense sticks and leaving spellbound. The daughter passed away after following this treatment for three weeks. The three brothers (aged five, seven, and eleven years) are witness to this act and believe it to be over and

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above the medication, as learned while chatting with them. Eight mothers believed that the free treatment which is given in the district hospital (government-run) is not good and prefer to visit two private doctors in the village because they treat well solely because the fee is charged. A mother was seen making a six-year-old girl defecate openly in a marketplace. Justified saying that the daughter had an emergency nature call and since there was no public convenience in proximity, the marketplace was chosen.

A husband rushed the wife to the hospital for the eighth delivery and was very lured of earning USD \$19 as per the government scheme named *Janani Suraksha Yojana* (Mother safety scheme) to support institutional delivery. Their wife's health and more children to feed became a secondary cause of concern to the man. A respondent had a five-year-old daughter and chose not to enroll the girl in the *Aanganwadi* center (government-run educational center) as it was very far off from their home in the village named *Muratganj* (Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, India). The girl had no education being imparted at home even in basic things as the mother was completely illiterate and belonged to the low sect of society, the poor upbringing was being passed on to the daughter at home. A couple gave dehydration medicine to their three-year-old child by closing the child's nostrils forcibly. The boy puked out even though the medicine was of kids taste. They shifted to homeopathic medicines. The latter did not suit the child and the boy was hospitalized for acute dehydration. A mother put mustard oil drops in the ears of a nine-year-old daughter as the girl was infected with a fungal infection. A five-year-old was playing with a tiny plastic piece in mouth and was hit by the mother. The child inhaled the object due to the force and underwent lung surgery. An anemic woman had fifth delivery and the child weighed 1800 grams. According to the pediatrician of the district hospital in the study area, the Accredited Social Health Activist and *Aanganwadi* workers should be trained to explain to poor mothers the way they should feed such low-weight newborns, in case a woman opts for home delivery.

Humans are overwhelmed by ennui due to the un- or under-employment. Annual Report 2018-19 states that the unemployment rate has risen by nearly four percent since last year in the rural areas. A respondent shared that the per month income was USD \$105. The man had a wife, mother, four children, and no farming land. The eldest daughter was 17-years old, followed by two sons and the youngest one was three years old. It was difficult to meet the daily errands of the family with petty income. The children had eaten non-vegetarian food at various gatherings in the neighborhood. The father felt bad when he failed to provide the non-vegetarian food to the children repeatedly and hence, preached to them to quit it due to religious reasons. Now, the children are content with what their father instructed and they are being tutored to respect the religion. The inferences from the field cases are given in table 2.

**Table 2: Conclusions about parents following inconvenient parenting practice**

S. No.	Conclusions about parents in unpleasant and irrational cases
1	Unaware of sleep importance for child
2	Unaware that book benefits learning of child
3	Unaware of cons of shouting at child
4	Unaware of girl's need to be independent
5	Unaware of teaching girls about their private part
6	Unaware of language development in child
7	Unaware of healthy discipline for child

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8	Unaware of right medications for child
9	Teaching children that exorcise is needed
10	Government medical facilities are considered bad
11	Disrespecting children
12	Unaware of several pregnancies/ contraception
13	Education is not given due importance
14	Unaware of rational explanations
15	Follow traditional medical treatments which are researched to be bad
16	Unaware of bad impact of hitting child
17	Unaware about bad impact of anger expression in front of child
18	Unaware of rational excuses that could be explained to child

The next section lists the parenting-related modifications in policies that could enable mothers to effective partnership with children, greater reflexivity, safety, and contribution to the building of their self-confidence.

### *Impactful cases with pleasant upbringing tactics*

A mother was playing with the eight-month-old baby during the act of trying to sit. The clapping gesture by the mother made the baby smile. This is an example of mental surveillance and the baby feels self-confident. Children should be explained the right reason well to rationalize their curiosity and generate interest in any issue. A pleasant household had a Hindi language newspaper delivered daily and the mother used to cut the interesting pictures from the paper that were pasted in a notebook. The onus of giving a brief explanation of the picture lay with the father because the mother was illiterate. According to the uneducated parents, this is a nice move to generate interest in children towards general knowledge as the events of today shall be history in child's adulthood. In one street of the study area, lived three dogs. Three children used to play with them and serve them leftover food of their homes. They were bathing the dogs in water at a tube well which was some kilometers down the road.

Children learn to care about, after being exposed to pets and their immunity level rises as the dogs are germ carriers. One elder brother aged nineteen was keen to play cricket and was accompanied by the younger three-year-old brother. The younger ones have a keen sense of observation. By virtue of the same, the younger brother used to put forth cricket-related questions to the elder brother who explained the rules of the game. A family of six members used to laugh aloud (laughter therapy). On seeing them laugh a nine-month-old baby used to laugh. Any individual facing some sort of emotional distress feels better with laughter therapies which have been termed self-care (Hatzipapas et. al, 2017). A mother involved the daughter to help in the kitchen chores and the art of stitching/ knitting, the girl learned good culinary skills and embroidery respectively. Using an ice cream stick and a plastic bottle, the mother crafted a game for a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. A small notch was made in the bottle cap which made it into a piggybank.

### *Creating Co-Parenting Lab*

Apart from the door-to-door counseling of sharing suggestions while taking surveys (as mentioned above), more awareness opportunities were created. The camp was organized to counsel mothers who were Accredited Social Health Activists (paraprofessionals) in Appendix III. The women advocates were made to hear parenting audios by Raj (2019). They were circulated amongst the users of WhatsApp. A Hindi-television news channel



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heard the audios which were being circulated on the social media and chose to organize a debate titled, “How to fulfill the role of mother-father, effectively?” (In First Language by Bharat Samachar, 2019). This was done to create awareness amongst the rural masses on the child bringing concern which is presently being ignored by many people.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There should be a continuation in framing women and child-centric policies but after a better understanding of what are promising areas of work. The government could organize regular training sessions for the poor mothers with two agendas. One would be to train them to hand-craft toys for children. More detailed rules are needed in National Education Policy 2019, in reference to the parent-child relationship. Teachers could read the various digital pieces on the websites/ books and share information with the women. Alternatively, learn from parent instructors. The parent training process for rural India is briefly explained in figure 2.

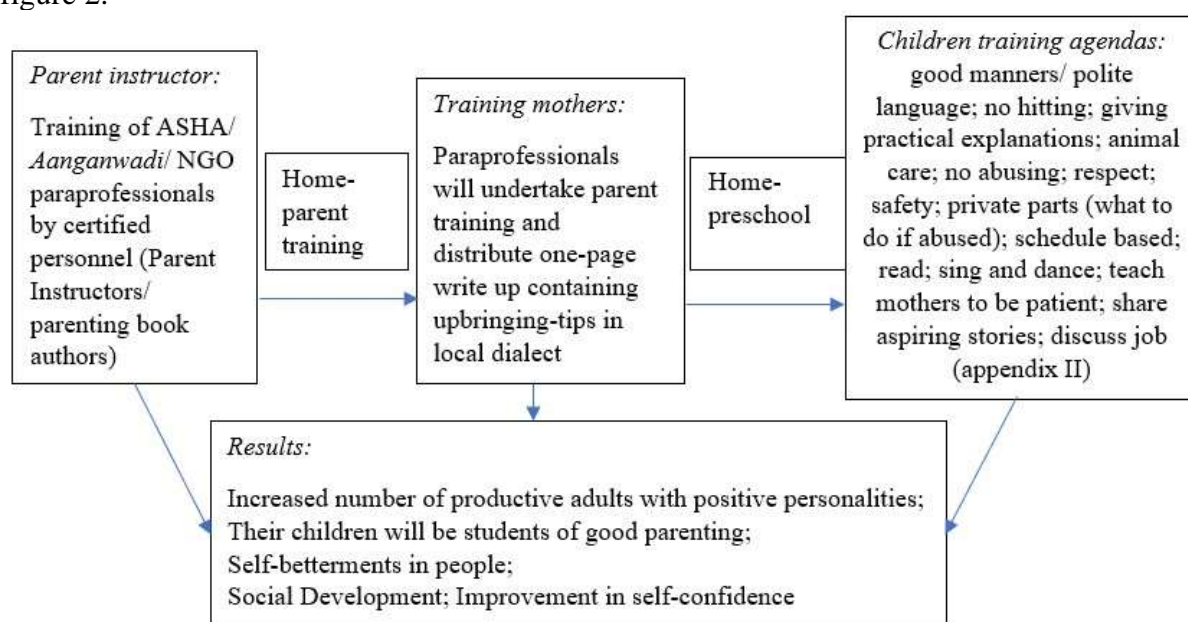


Figure 2: Proposed parent training process for rural India (Source: Author)

Overarching the three suggestions, the government may pass a new policy that mandates the working teams of villages to initiate parenting lessons to all the mothers of rural areas, precisely “By All to Educate All” in the context of education. This article elicits that rural India needs parent instructors without that the current investments in human capital fail to provide substantial social values.

### DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSION

An urban mother has access to digital pieces, printed books, and, educated family members/neighbors while a rural mother lacks access to them and is illiterate to comprehend and follow the same. Things are changing on the ground. There is a felt need of social entrepreneurs to be created in the parenting sector. Because what happens with a poor mother: who is too uneducated to understand books; who is not learned enough to follow a suggestion; who has a bad acrimonious atmosphere at home and is seeking help; whose medical helpmates have a bad parenting knowledge to share with her; does good baby grow up with bad parenting? This study focused on mother parenting initiatives that would foster better warmth and care to the children who would be the future workforce.

### *Future scope*

It is done with parenting practices in the rural homes in one district out of 725, in India as of 2019. It is suggested to replicate in other districts through empirical evidence to support the fact that the rural mothers should be educated in the area of parenting to promote development of children and empower women. More secondary data is required to support the finding that poor mothers are unaware of the documented upbringing practices and rural India needs parent instructors.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

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### **Appendix III**

***Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, India dated October 2019***



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<sup>i</sup> Singh (2018) suggests that parents should call the child to them in case they witness an intimate activity and explain the concept of family-love. Telling them to go away will generate more curiosity in child.

<sup>ii</sup>Reading books to new-born progresses listening skills. For more details on books, see Spellings (2000)