

## Abstract

Until recent times the period of Infancy was considered as a "wordless oblivion" period. A great deal of attention was focussed on the period of infancy with the development of the 'critical period' concept. In addition medical and psychological research have demonstrated that infant is "behaviourally competent".

With the increasing trend of women joining the labour force and the occupational structure shifting from the traditional informal sector to the modern sector, a pronounced need for alternative infant and child day care arrangements is noted.

Recent research on deprivation, pointing to a combined importance of early stimulation and quality of care, has aroused interest in devoting more systematic attention to the caregiving programmes throughout the world.

In this study, an attempt was made to examine the infant day care programmes adopted by the sub-urban communities of Colombo. The study was conducted in a gramaniladhari division of a selected sub-urban area with a sample of 33 working mothers.

Mothers' perceptions of the adopted day care programmes , reasons for adopting these programmes , the type of day care desired were also investigated. the caregiver being one of the major determinants for physical and psychological development of an infant, caregiver behaviour in caregiving situations were also studied.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using in-depth interview and open continuous observations.

Analysis of data revealed that majority of the working mothers left their infants to the informal care of the household. Though extended family arrangements were rare, extended family members were engaged in the provision of satisfactory care for the infants. Although domestic aids were employed as caregivers , working mothers were dissatisfied with their services. No formal or informal group infant care programmes were available. Only one group care arrangement which is a pre-school cum day care centre was found in the locality.

Majority of mothers tried to find a caregiver from the family circle and having no other alternative was the major reason given by working mothers who left the infants with caregivers who are non-relatives.

Mothers desired the establishment of formal day care centres with trained staff as an alternative day care arrangement for their infants.

Observation of caregiving situations revealed that majority of caregivers were providing satisfactory care. They mainly focussed on basic caregiving routines. The emphasis on stimulative play and verbal interaction was found to be considerably low.

Though caregivers did not possess any formal experience in caregiving, majority had personal experiences in infant care.

It was concluded that the combined importance of early stimulation and quality of care has not thus far aroused an adequate interest in the Sri Lankan Society. The period of infancy has been one of the less visible segments of the population. Although several proposals have been made for establishment of early childhood care and education they are yet to be materialised.