

FATHERS, THEIR PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Project Background

The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (2022) in India outlines the centrality of ‘play’ in the early years, and the crucial role played by families, and communities at this time¹. Research shows that playful learning experiences for young children help foster their development in key cognitive, physical and socio-emotional areas and can prepare the ground for them to become creative, engaged and lifelong learners. **Moreover, a supportive adult guiding a child through play can unlock these transformative early learning experiences and build readiness and motivation for future learning.** That children learn through play in the early years is emphasized by The National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework (for all children up to the age of 6)².

This framework also states that, “whether children receive early education and care in the home or the community, it is important that their early learning

1. NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOUNDATIONAL STAGE

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IS TO ENSURE QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH PROVIDING GUIDELINES FOR CHILD CARE AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES, AS WELL AS TO ADDRESS THE WIDESPREAD DIVERSITY IN ECCE PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN INDIA. IT IS A DYNAMIC DOCUMENT DESIGNED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD AND PROMOTE OPTIMUM LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT. NATIONAL ECCE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

experiences draw on the unique strengths of their relationships with their families”³. At the same time, it acknowledges that families may face stresses that compromise their ability to support their children’s early learning, and therefore need services to assist them in their critical role as primary caregivers⁴. This research investigates the differences in the stressors that mothers and fathers face, and their differentiated roles in caring for the early years child. The parental engagement programs that participated in this research have the potential to be gender transformative in their involvement of fathers, but to do so an understanding of fathers’ current roles in caregiving, and how these are shaped by the stresses that they face, is required.

3. IBID.

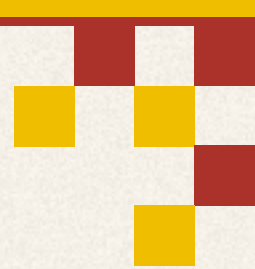
4. IBID.



whether children receive early education and care in the home or the community, it is important that their early learning experiences draw on the unique strengths of their relationships with their families



Research Purpose & Questions



The purpose of this research was to understand fathers' familial relationships, their attitude towards and involvement in early childhood development, and their own aspirations, concerns, self-perceptions and influences, so as to identify opportunities for them to be easily involved in their children's learning. The research questions are below.

Q.A How involved is the father, either in interactions with or discussions about, the child?

Q.D What are the family's expectations of the father? What are the father's roles in the family now, in comparison with before the child was 3?

Q.B What makes the father the most satisfied and/or happy about being a parent?

Q.E What does the father think the child should be doing at this age, and why?

Q.C What are the father's aspirations and concerns for the child?

Q.F Who do fathers consult when making decisions, ask for advice from and aspire to be like?



Research Methods & Scope

The method that was used to answer the six research questions was qualitative. 152 fathers were interviewed for this study across urban and rural areas.

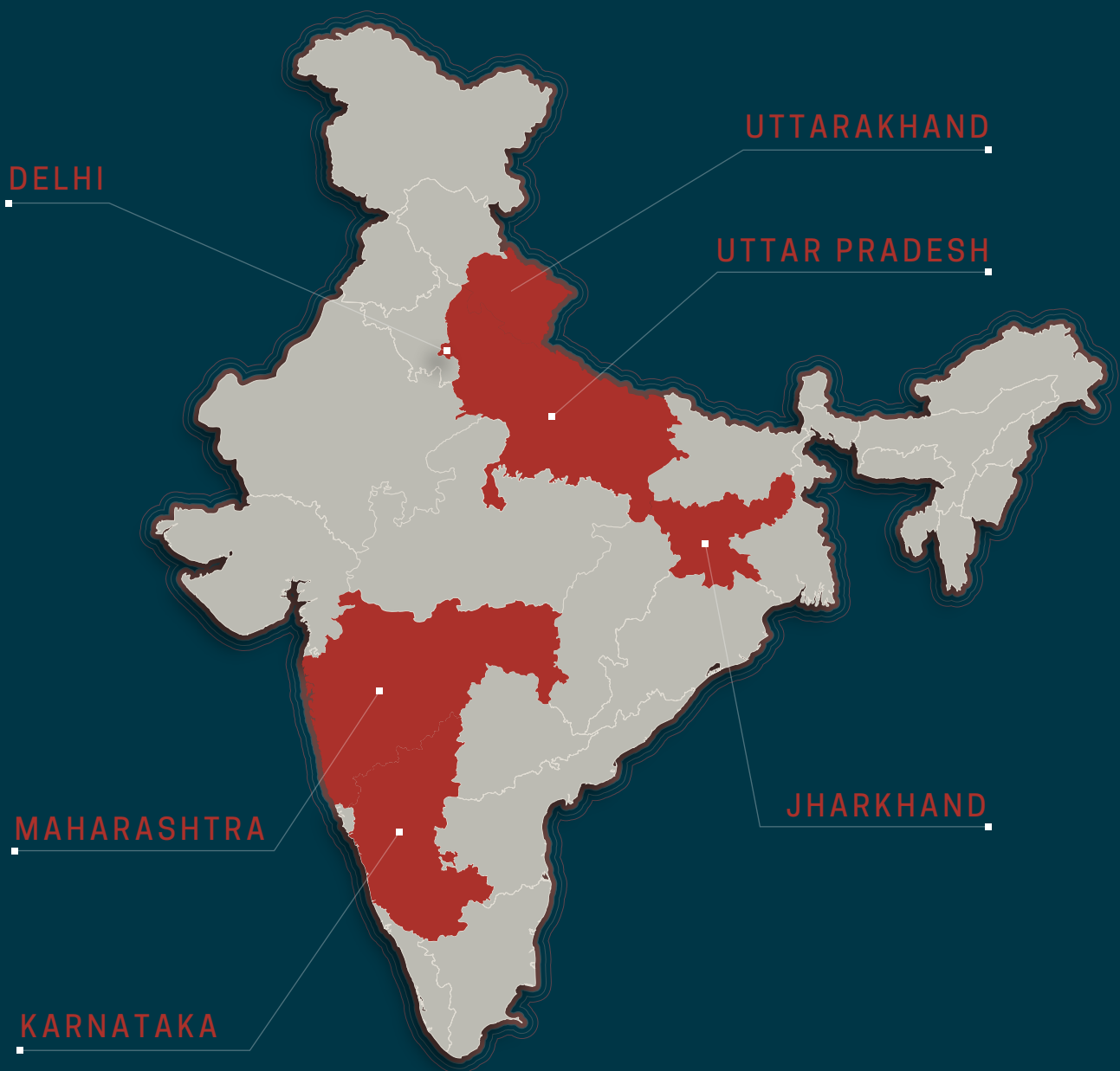


TABLE I: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE

Karnataka

| | |
|-------|----|
| Rural | 18 |
| Urban | 20 |

Maharashtra

| | |
|-------|----|
| Rural | 16 |
| Urban | 20 |

Jharkhand

| | |
|-------|----|
| Rural | 20 |
| Urban | 20 |

Uttar Pradesh

| | |
|-------|---|
| Rural | 6 |
| Urban | 7 |

Uttarakhand

| | |
|-------|----|
| Rural | 13 |
|-------|----|

Delhi

| |
|----|
| 12 |
|----|



TABLE II: CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

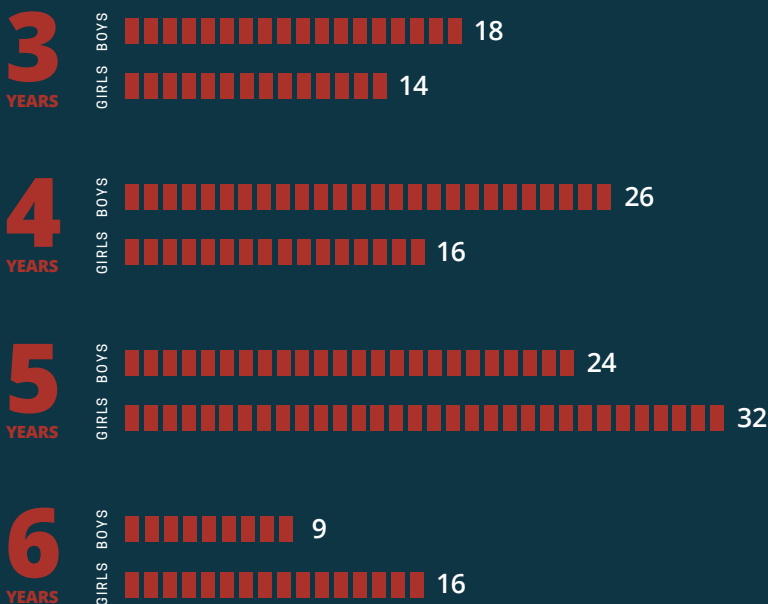


Table II provides demographic data on the children whose fathers were interviewed. An almost equal number of fathers of boys and girls were interviewed.

MODAL AGE

4 YEARS for **BOYS** **5** YEARS for **GIRLS**

TOTAL **77** BOYS
75 GIRLS



Findings

The 3 relationships that were investigated were between the father and his child, the child's mother, and the child's preschool. The first key finding was that the father's relationship with the child is one of joy and fun. The most common category of activity that the father does with the child is play, and at least among urban fathers, approximately half said that they had no concerns about the child. The father plays and interacts with the child in other ways voluntarily and/or because he enjoys doing so, not because he is expected to.

The two other categories of activities that the father does with the child are "assisting" and "coexisting". "Assisting" referred to activities that the father does to help either the mother or the preschool, such as getting the child ready, asking about his/her schoolwork, bathing and feeding the child, and putting him/her to sleep. "Coexisting" referred to activities such as eating with the child and co-sleeping.

The second key finding was that the father's relationship with the child's mother is one of collaboration and partnership. Evidence of collaboration and partnership emerged from the interviews of both rural and urban fathers, although in response to different questions. Among rural fathers, the majority believed that both parents are responsible for the child's development, rather than the mother alone. (Urban fathers were more divided on this question). In contrast, for overall advice urban fathers more commonly mentioned asking their wives than their rural counterparts.

Regardless of these nuances, for both urban and rural fathers their wives are their key influencers in discussions and decision-making about the child. These findings are surprising, when triangulated with the Pew Research Center's survey of 29,999 adults in India. This research found that approximately 90% of the respondents agreed that a wife must always obey her husband. Yet among the same respondents, nearly three-quarters said that both men and women should make financial decisions in a family⁵.

These results indicate that while Indians believe a wife must always obey her husband, this does not preclude them from also believing that joint decision-making is appropriate in some

spheres. This ability to hold contradictory beliefs at the same time is one possible explanation for the surprising discrepancy between the Pew Research Center's survey and the current study. To the extent that this explanation is correct, it is less surprising that one of the spheres in which joint decision-making would be deemed appropriate is parenting, given that traditionally in India it is the mother who has been responsible for childcare.

While the father's relationship with the child's mother is one of collaboration and partnership, he also believes that the two parents have separate spheres of responsibility for their child's development. When asked about the mother's responsibilities, fathers most often mentioned those related to maintaining a routine for the child. Examples of these responsibilities were accompanying the child to school and back, feeding and bathing the child, and putting him/her to bed.

In contrast, for both urban and rural fathers, one of the main expectations that they said that their families had of them was that they should provide for the family financially. In addition, both urban and rural fathers said that they were responsible for making purchases for the child (rather than the mother). Urban fathers said they were expected to enrol

5. PEW RESEARCH CENTER IS A NONPARTISAN FACT TANK THAT CARRIES OUT RESEARCH ON A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS INCLUDING RELIGIOUS CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIETIES. IT PUBLISHED A STUDY TITLED 'HOW INDIANS VIEW GENDER ROLES IN FAMILIES AND SOCIETY' IN MARCH 2022, WHICH IS PART OF THEIR LARGER EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THESE CHANGES AROUND THE WORLD. HOW INDIANS VIEW GENDER ROLES IN FAMILIES AND SOCIETY | PEW RESEARCH CENTER

the child in school, and the multiple options available in the market made it difficult to choose.

The third key finding was that the father's relationship with the preschool is complicated, and creates a dichotomy between what fathers believe children should learn and what they are teaching them. The dichotomy is that while fathers believe children should learn a range of skills, subjects and behaviours, when asked what they are teaching them the range of responses narrowed to those focused on the alphabet, numbers and math. The results indicate that because many of fathers' "assisting" activities revolve around the preschool, when preschools focus narrowly on teaching the alphabet and numbers, so do fathers.

That fathers believe children should learn a range of skills, subjects and behaviours, and did not uniformly value preschools that gave their children regular homework and exams, was a surprising finding. Comparing this finding with FSG's customer research for PIPE, its Program to Improve Private Early Education, indicates a possible divergence between what mothers and fathers value from preschools. While FSG reported that 98% of parents ask for developmentally

inappropriate preschool education such as regular homework and exams, their research was conducted primarily with mothers⁶. In other words, it is possible that mothers value preschools that give their children regular homework and exams more than fathers do.

No substantial evidence of negative discrimination against girls by their fathers emerged from the analysis, and this again was surprising. This finding challenged an assumption with which the study was begun, which was that son preference was still prevalent in India, and therefore girls would be preferred less by their fathers than boys, and receive fewer opportunities to learn and play. As other research in countries with son preference has found⁷, it was expected that irrespective of who parents, young girls would receive less access to health care, education and nutrition, opportunities to play and access to early learning than young boys. However, it is possible that the preference for sons exclusively is no longer prevalent in India (as the results from the Pew Research Center's work on gender roles in Indian families and society indicate)⁸, in which case the lack of discrimination against girls found in the current study is not unexpected after all.

6. FSG IS A GLOBAL CONSULTING FIRM DEDICATED TO UNDERSTANDING AND PROMOTING SOCIAL IMPACT. THEIR PROGRAM TO IMPROVE PRIVATE EARLY EDUCATION SEEKS TO PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED IN LIFE TO ALL CHILDREN IN INDIA BY REPLACING ROTE LEARNING WITH ACTIVITY-BASED LEARNING IN AFFORDABLE PRIVATE SCHOOLS. THIS RESEARCH AIMED TO GAIN INSIGHT INTO THE SIZE AND CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR OF THE URBAN AFFORDABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) MARKET IN INDIA. AFFORDABLE ECE PROGRAM CUSTOMER RESEARCH - FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS | FSG.ORG

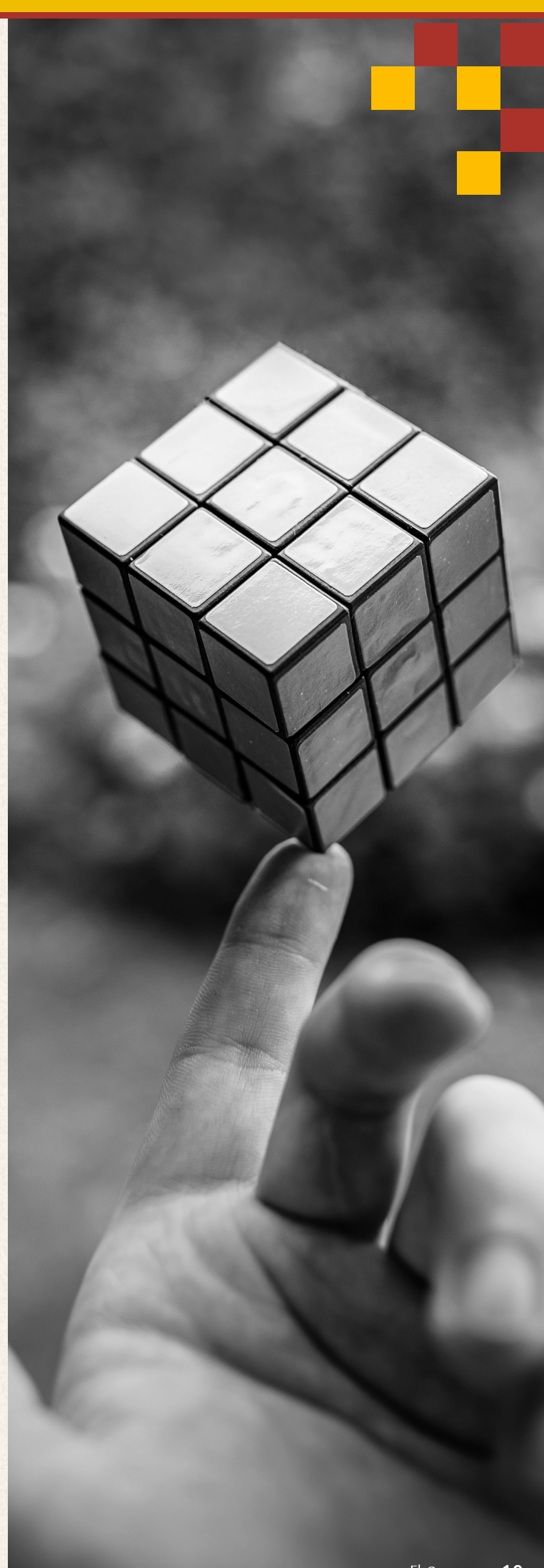
7. MURTHY, R.K., 2018. PARENTAL CARE AND THE YOUNG CHILD. TECHNICAL BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE REPORT 2020. MOBILE CRECHES, NEW DELHI.

8. HOW INDIANS VIEW GENDER ROLES IN FAMILIES AND SOCIETY | PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Conclusions

As stark differences were not found between fathers, it is appropriate to conclude with the common beliefs and challenges that emerged across fathers, as well as the opportunities to engage them. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that arriving at common beliefs, challenges and opportunities does involve a certain degree of generalization. With this caveat, common beliefs that fathers held have been identified, along with how these can be leveraged and/or shifted, so that fathers are empowered to create learning moments and spaces for their early years children. The beliefs which can be leveraged are presented first (1-5), followed by those to be shifted.

To leverage beliefs 3 and 4, strategies to enhance both supply and demand are recommended. To enhance supply, it is important to work with affordable and/or public preschools to improve their ability to provide a holistic education to their students. To enhance demand, it is important to educate fathers on how to identify such preschools in their local area.



BELIEF 1

Fathers aspire for their children to be educated. Fathers believe that education is important for both their daughters and sons.

BELIEF 2

Fathers believe they are expected to be involved in their child's education (albeit to different degrees in urban and rural settings).

BELIEF 3

Fathers believe that parents should support the child's development through teaching him / her. (However, see Belief 6).

BELIEF 4

At the same time, fathers also believe that it is important to send their early years child to preschool, and that the preschool should provide a quality education.

BELIEF 5

Fathers believe that play is important in the early years. Fathers believe that play is equally important for their daughters and sons.

BELIEF 6

Fathers believe that their role in supporting the child's mental development is limited to reinforcing what the school is teaching

BELIEF 7

Fathers believe that play is necessary for the child's physical development, and as a respite for the child from studying. However, fathers believe that play does not contribute to the child's mental development.



A third strategy that has promise (either independently of or in addition to the first two) is to encourage fathers to engage their child in playful learning, regardless of the teaching methods promoted by the preschool. This strategy has promise because “play” is already an important part of fathers’ interactions with their early years child. Aside from specific play times, mealtimes provide an opportunity for fathers to engage the child in conversation, asking about his / her day and encouraging the child to be curious about the father’s day as well. For those fathers who work long hours and do not share mealtimes with their child, calling the child while working can also create a similar learning moment.

However, the challenges to engaging fathers in playful learning are that not only do fathers work long hours but they believe they should, as they perceive their main role in the family as being the financial provider. It is possible to imagine systemic changes that would create more economic opportunities for mothers, and more flexible working hours for both parents. However, as long as fathers believe that it is their responsibility to be the financial provider, they are unlikely to take advantage of opportunities to share this responsibility with their wives, and/or work shorter hours to spend more time with their children. It is therefore important to engage mothers to understand whether they aspire for better economic opportunities outside the home and a more equal distribution of childcare responsibilities within it, and if so, how these aspirations and expectations can be communicated to fathers.

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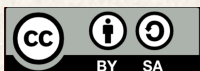
Research undertaken by: **Probex Consulting**



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