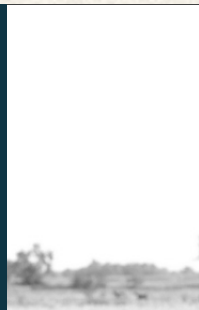
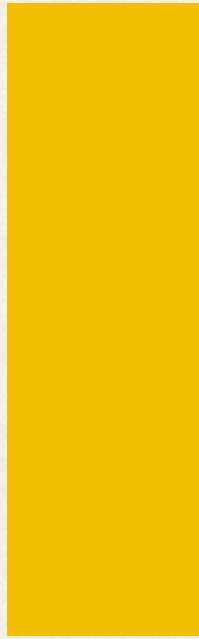


FATHERS, THEIR PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

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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, 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 experiences draw on the unique strengths of their

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.

(https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/national_ecce_curr_framework_final_03022014%20%282%29.pdf)

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.

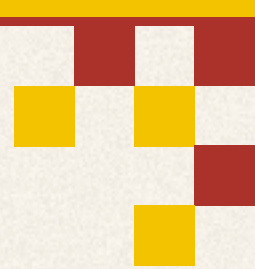
3. Ibid.

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

This research is expected to primarily inform 2 outcomes.

FIRST OUTCOME

The first outcome is to identify the prevalent narrative and mental models around the early years child, through understanding fathers' familial relationships, their attitude towards and involvement in early childhood development, and their own aspirations, concerns, self-perceptions and influences.

SECOND OUTCOME

The second outcome is to empower parents and family members to create learning moments and spaces at home for their early years children. This research contributes to this outcome by identifying opportunities for fathers to be easily involved in their children's learning.

The study began with joint brainstorming by Probex and EkStep Foundation to identify several research questions. Feedback from Key Education Foundation, Dost Education and Rocket Learning was also considered in formulating the research questions. For example, 2 questions that were incorporated into the research based on this feedback were on fathers' role models, as well as their concerns about parenting.

The study was designed in 3 phases, with the research questions distributed across them. This study design enabled an iterative process, in which based on the findings from each phase that was completed, the remaining research questions were modified. Upon completion of data collection and analysis for all 3 phases, the final set of research questions that the study investigated was created retrospectively. This final set of research questions is on the next page.

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



Q.A1 What are the activities that the father does with the child? What is the frequency with which the father does these activities?

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.A2 What are the discussions that the father participates in about the child, and how often?

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

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

Q.E1 Does the father think that learning is important for the child at this age? If so, how does the father believe the child learns, and is play one of the ways?

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



Q.E2 Does the father believe that play is important for the child, independent of learning?

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



Research Methods, Scope & Limitations

3.1. Research Methods

The method that was used to answer the six research questions was qualitative. Qualitative research is an approach used to generate knowledge about human experience and/or action, including social processes. It typically produces descriptive (non-numerical) data, such as observations of behavior or personal accounts or experiences.⁵

Given that qualitative methods are normally used to study peoples' beliefs and relationships⁶ they were appropriate for this study, which focuses on fathers' beliefs about learning, play and parenting, relationships with other family members, and experience of fatherhood.

While qualitative studies generally do not exceed a sample size of 100⁷, 152 fathers were interviewed for this study. A strength of this study is therefore its ability to provide in-depth analysis despite a relatively large sample size. Finally, as is appropriate for qualitative research, purposive rather than probability sampling was used to recruit fathers of children in the 3-6 age group to participate. While the results are not statistically representative, the sampling strategy did ensure the inclusion of fathers of both boys and girls, in rural and urban locations in 4 regions of the country.

5. AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S (APA) JOURNAL ARTICLE REPORTING STANDARDS (JARS) SUPPLEMENTAL GLOSSARY

6. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS: A DATA COLLECTOR'S FIELD GUIDE (FHI360.ORG)

7. QUANTITATIVE-AND-QUALITATIVE-METHODS.PDF (INTRAC.ORG)

3.2. Sample and Interview Mode

Fathers were recruited from the northern, southern, eastern and western regions of the country, but not from Northeast India.

In the southern, eastern and western regions, the states of Karnataka, Jharkhand and Maharashtra were chosen respectively.

In the northern region, fathers were recruited from Delhi, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.



The central Indian states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh were also excluded, although some definitions of this region do include Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and/or Maharashtra (see section 3.3 for further discussion on the omitted regions).

Data was collected exclusively through phone interviews in all regions except for Jharkhand. In Jharkhand, a combination of in-person and phone interviews was used. The methods used to recruit respondents also differed in Jharkhand and the other regions. In Jharkhand, fathers were recruited through the personal networks of the interviewer. In all the other regions, fathers were recruited either through parent engagement programs or a data collection agency. The respondents recruited by the data collection agency received a financial incentive to participate in the study, but the other fathers did not (discussed in section 3.3).

Of the total sample of 152 fathers, 43% of them were recruited through parent engagement programs. Fathers had in turn been recruited into these programs through the pre-schools or schools in which their children were enrolled. Most of these fathers had children studying in public pre-schools or schools. Fathers recruited through parent engagement programs were primarily interviewed in Phases 1 and 2.

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
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Delhi

12



TABLE II: CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

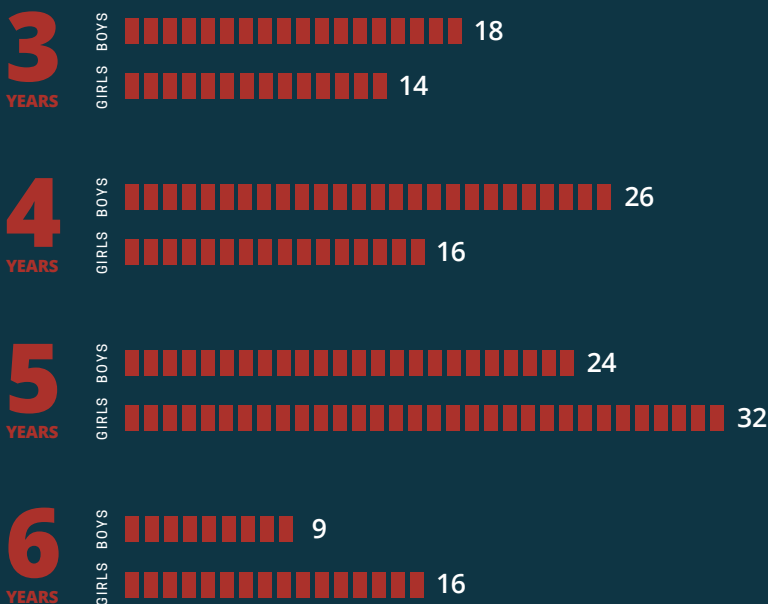
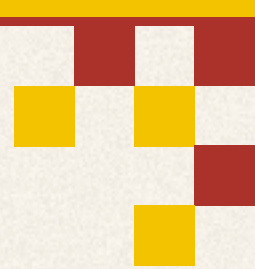


Table II provides demographic data on the children whose fathers were interviewed. An almost equal number of fathers of boys and girls were interviewed.

MODAL AGE

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

TOTAL **77** BOYS
75 GIRLS



3.3. Limitations

The final sample achieved was approximately equally distributed between fathers of boys and girls, in urban and rural areas, and across the 4 regions. While the intended sample composition was therefore achieved, a key limitation of the sampling strategy (as mentioned earlier) was that it excluded the Northeast Region and, to a lesser extent, Central India. Therefore, until the results of this study are validated in at least one state each in the Northeast Region and Central India, they should not be assumed to be applicable to those regions.

The second limitation to the study was that it could not ensure that all the fathers who participated were recruited under the same terms. While initially fathers were recruited through parental engagement programs and were not provided with a financial incentive to participate, due to low response rates this strategy did not prove viable in most regions. Changing the strategy to recruit fathers through a data collection agency rather than parental engagement programs, and provide them with a financial incentive, proved successful in improving response rates. Analysis of the interviews also did not indicate any differences between the responses of fathers who received an incentive and

those who did not. However, from an ethical perspective it would have been ideal if all the fathers who participated were recruited under the same terms.

The third limitation to the study was that there was a high degree of variation in the number of responses received for each question asked of fathers. This variation existed due to multiple factors. For one, fathers found some questions difficult to answer, and fewer responses were received for those. Also, some questions were repeated in multiple phases of the research (and therefore received more responses), while others were not.

Finally, although interviewers received training before each phase of the research and were supervised closely, there were some instances when the interviewer skipped certain questions. Despite an almost 1:1 ratio between interviewers and supervisors, it was not possible to make sure that no questions were skipped. Given that all these factors contributed to a high degree of variation in how many responses each question received, the analysis in section 4 is based on the number of available responses to each question, and therefore the strength of the evidence is not uniform for all the findings.



Findings and Conclusions

4.1 FINDINGS

4.1.1. Father-Child Interactions

As fathers' interactions with their children were asked about in all 3 phases of the research, a large volume of responses was gathered. Among urban fathers, the activities that they did with their child were divided into 3 categories. These categories can be termed, “assisting”, “coexisting”, and “playing”.

The most common category of activity that urban fathers did with their child in the day preceding the interview (and therefore presumably daily) is “play”. Due to the timing of the interviews, the most common “play” activity in Maharashtra was celebrating the Ganpati festival. However, excluding the Ganpati festival, the most common play activity was cricket, which fathers played both with their sons and daughters.



In urban Jharkhand, more fathers described daily activities that fall into the “assisting” category than in the other states. Examples of assisting activities that were related to “school” (see section 4.1.6) were getting the child ready and asking about his/her schoolwork. Assisting activities that were not related to school were bathing and feeding the child, and putting him/her to sleep.

The third category, “coexisting”, refers to activities such as eating together or co-sleeping. In urban Maharashtra, Karnataka and UP, a few fathers said that they ate together with their child. In urban Jharkhand, no respondents mentioned any activities in the “coexisting” category that they had done in the past day. Urban fathers in 3 of the 4 regions were also asked about activities they had done with their child in the last week. There were no observable differences in the activities that fathers did with their children daily and weekly.

Among rural fathers, the differences were less pronounced between regions. In both rural Jharkhand and Karnataka, fathers’ daily activities with children were almost equally divided between “assisting” and “playing”. In rural Maharashtra and UP more fathers described “playing” with rather than “assisting” their child daily, but the differences were not stark.

The activities that constituted “playing” were similar for urban and rural fathers. While in one phase of the research rural fathers said that they went out more with their child than their urban counterparts, this difference was not observed in the other phases. Some of the places that fathers said they took their children to were the market, a relative’s house, a mall, a temple and the railway station. Among the activities that constituted “assisting”, a recurring theme among rural fathers was helping the child learn the alphabets. One father said that he had bought a big chart with letters and made his daughter read them out.



We watch movies on the TV when I'm tired. Otherwise, we go out on Sundays. We go to the outskirts of Tumkur sometimes, or to festivals/fairs.

40 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD GIRL IN RURAL KARNATAKA





FIGURE I: FATHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

More rural than urban fathers mentioned that they ate together with their child. While the differences were not substantial, it is possible that urban fathers were employed further from home, and therefore were not at home during their children’s mealtimes. One rural father described co-sleeping with the child.

Beyond “assisting”, “playing” and “coexisting”, there was one other activity that rural fathers said that they did with their children. This activity was teaching the child functional skills. Examples of functional skills were riding a bicycle, handwashing, and bathing. Unlike rural fathers, only one urban respondent said that he had taught his child a functional skill (learning to dress).

4.1.2. The Highlights Of Fatherhood

When urban respondents were asked what made them satisfied and/or happy about being fathers, the responses were varied, and only a few focused on the activities that they did with the child. Playing was mentioned by a few fathers, as was educating the child or studying with him/her. One father (of a girl) said specifically that the child’s interest in sports made him satisfied and/or happy.

Interestingly, many more fathers described daily moments that made them satisfied and/or happy than special events or milestones. Some of these moments were not activity-related. One father said that the child makes him forget his worries when he returns from work, and others described the child’s welcome or smile at that time as making them happy. In urban Karnataka the most common response was that, “every day is happy”, which indicates that these fathers found all the activities that they do with, or moments that they have with, the child enjoyable.



“

It is satisfying just to see his smiling face and be with him after returning home from work. No matter how tired I am and how many loads I have carried, I feel very relaxed to return to my wife and son at home. I feel refreshed even when I just sit with him. Otherwise, the entire day, I am loading and offloading from trucks.

32 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN RURAL MAHARASHTRA

A few urban fathers described qualities of the child that made them satisfied and/or happy. These qualities were respecting elders, being obedient, and being fastidious. One unusual response was from a father who said that he is happy when, “the child comes to him with curiosity”.

Similar to their urban counterparts, only a few rural fathers focused on activities they did with the child that made them satisfied and/or happy, such as playing or studying. Once again, one father of a girl said that it made him happy when “the child is active in studies and sports, and is happy”. Rural fathers also said that they felt happy when they returned home and their child announced their arrival or ran to them.

However, rural fathers were more divided than their urban counterparts over whether it was daily moments that made them happy, or special events and milestones. Some of the milestones mentioned were the child’s birthdays, festivals, and when he/she first walked. Of these, the most mentioned milestone was the child’s birthday.

A few rural fathers also described qualities of the child that made them satisfied and/or happy. These qualities included respecting elders and being obedient (which were also mentioned by urban fathers), as well as being lively and loving. Interestingly, none of the rural fathers mentioned buying specific gifts for the child that made them happy, and in fact one respondent said that he was happy that his child is content with what he has. Although as a whole urban fathers did not mention buying gifts often, a few fathers had said that buying the child books, a cycle and other toys made them happy.

4.1.3. Aspirations and Concerns for the Child

Just as with their interactions with the child and what made fathers happy, there were no differences in the aspirations that urban respondents had for their daughters and sons over the next few years. For both, the most common response was that the child should study well. Among the few urban fathers who said that the child should also develop physically or improve at sports, these aspirations also applied to both boys and girls. Some of the sports mentioned were cricket and swimming.





Like every parent, I hope [my daughter] becomes an all rounder with good values, progress in education, sports and singing. She likes to sing (paraphrased).

33 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 3 YEAR OLD GIRL IN URBAN MAHARASHTRA

In addition to the father above, a few other urban respondents mentioned that they wanted their child to have a good character or become a good person.

There were a few fathers (including the respondent quoted) whose responses indicated that the child's self-realization was also important. One father said that his daughter should become whatever she wants. Another said that his son should be allowed to express his talents.

Among the rural respondents, fathers in Phase 1 in both Maharashtra and Uttarakhand struggled to understand the question about their aspirations for their child over the next few years. However, among the respondents in Uttarakhand who were able to answer the question, most were fathers of girls. A few mentioned that their daughters should both study well and excel in sports, although one also said that she should learn to do housework.

Two fathers in rural Uttarakhand mentioned specific evidence that they would look for to know that their child was developing well. One said that when his son returns home from school, he should be able to tell you what he did / learnt that day. The other said that his daughter should be able to read a book and write (in English) by the time she reaches grade 5 or 6.

This father went on to say, "I believe that a girl is over and above a boy. She's a form of Lakshmi. She should get educated".

In Phase 2, across rural fathers, the physical development of the child was the most mentioned aspiration. More specifically, fathers mentioned that the child should eat healthy food, run around and dance. One father said that the child's height and weight should increase with age. A few fathers said that their child should participate in extracurricular activities, such as music and yoga classes (for both their physical and mental development).

A few fathers described their aspiration for their child to be outside, and learn through asking questions. All these responses are discussed collectively in 4.1.7. An illustrative response, from a father in rural Karnataka, is on the next page.

Finally, a few fathers described wanting their child to become more disciplined and better behaved. One father said that his son should learn discipline and rules. Another said that his son should be less mischievous, shouldn't quarrel with his sister, and should learn to accept it when he loses.

When asking fathers about their aspirations for their child, some respondents mentioned their concerns as well.



“

I want him to make good friends. He should be active playing, running, and roaming here and there. He should play in the park very actively. Whatever he sees, he should have questions about. He should ask, “Why is it like this? In what way is that?” That's when he will develop his ability to learn (paraphrased).

33 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 3 YEAR OLD BOY
IN RURAL KARNATAKA





“

He should be less mischievous, he should not quarrel with his sister. He doesn't accept it when he loses...He should be fit and strong from eating well (paraphrased).

32 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A
6 YEAR OLD BOY IN RURAL KARNATAKA

For example, in the previous quote it is evident that the father's concerns are his son's mischievousness, quarrels with his sister, and inability to accept losing. Similarly, another father said that his child needs nutritious food to develop, but they are unable to provide that.

However, in Phase 1 fathers were also asked explicitly about whether they had concerns about their child. Approximately half of urban fathers said that they had concerns.

Given that the main aspiration of urban fathers was for their child to study well, it is not surprising that the child's academic performance was a key concern.

The other responses from fathers included both broad and specific concerns. A broad concern was the child's health. Some specific concerns were that the father is not spending enough time with the child, and that the child [is unsupervised and therefore] will be roaming around alone.

Other specific concerns were related to conflict and violence in the family. One father was concerned that parental discord shouldn't affect the child. Another father was concerned that his child had a disability, and doesn't speak up even when a family member beats her. However, the responses of the 2 fathers of children with disabilities (one urban and one rural) were not unusual in any other way, as like other

respondents they also mentioned the child's education, and being able to earn enough to support him/her, as concerns.

Overall, the concerns of rural fathers were remarkably similar to their urban counterparts. Just as with urban fathers, they were also concerned about the child's education. (Rural fathers' responses more explicitly mentioned that they were concerned about their ability to pay school fees.) A few rural fathers mentioned the child roaming around as a concern, emphasizing that it was important to pay attention to the child and not leave him/her unattended. Only a quarter of rural fathers said they had no concerns about their child, and they did not explain why.

In contrast, urban fathers who didn't have concerns often explained why. One father said that he didn't have concerns because the child's mother and sisters will act responsibly. Again, some of the responses explicitly referred to the gender of the child. The responses of 2 fathers implied that while it was expected for the father of a daughter to have concerns, these respondents didn't. One said that he didn't have concerns because, "We are forward-minded and our village and community are safe". Another father said he didn't have concerns because, "I am extremely proud and happy about having a daughter".

4.1.4. Discussions About The Child

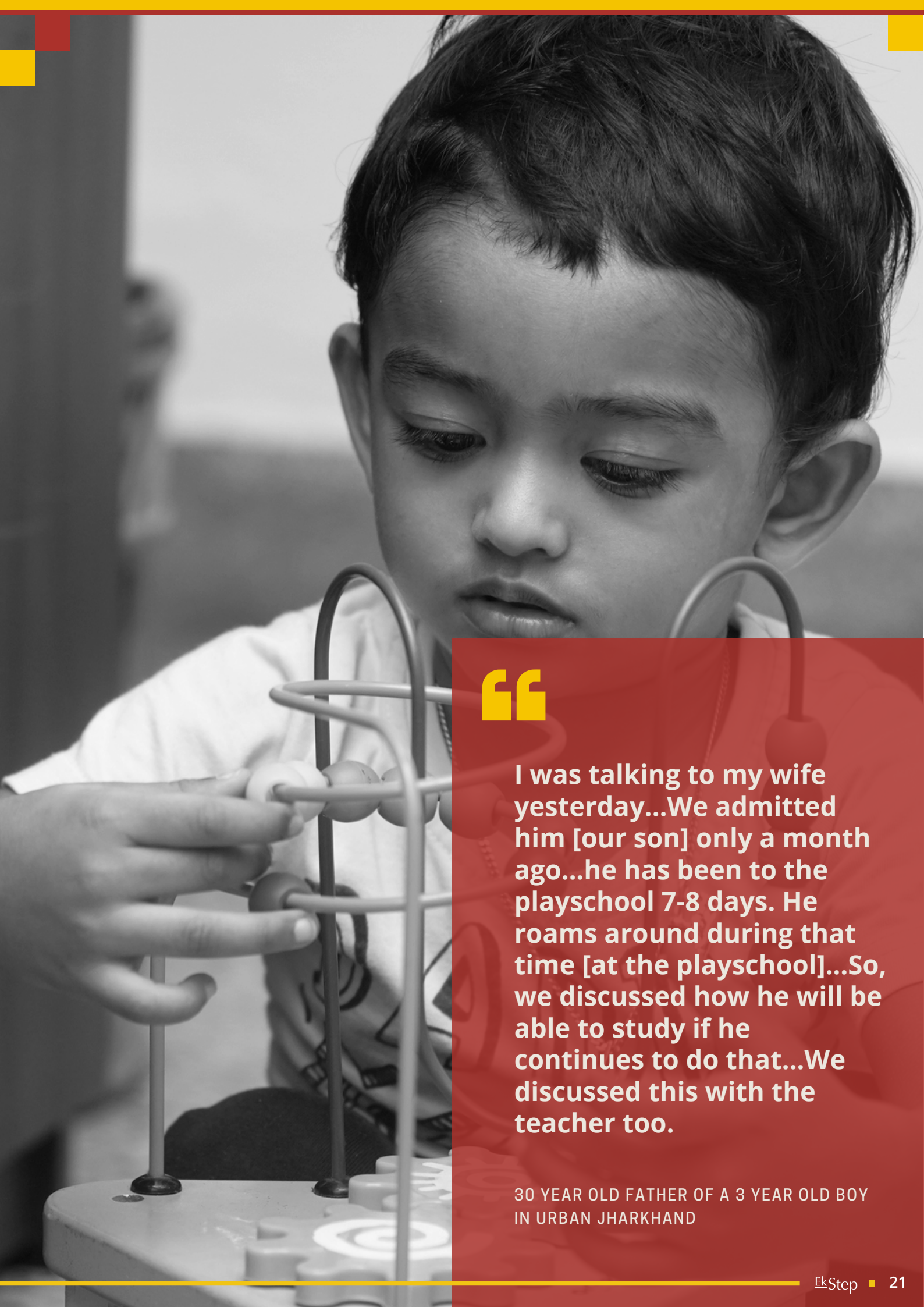
Although urban (and rural) respondents were most concerned about their child's education, the extent to which it was a topic of discussion varied from region to region. In urban UP and Maharashtra, fewer than a quarter of fathers mentioned it as a topic of discussion at all. In contrast, the responses of half or more of the fathers in urban Jharkhand and Karnataka indicate that the child's education is a topic they discuss at least once a week.

In particular, in urban Jharkhand a range of responses illustrated what specific aspects of the child's education fathers discussed in the previous day. One father said that the child's admission into school was discussed. A second father said that the child's academic progress, and how much he recalls, was discussed. A third said that the child's upcoming exams, his preparation, and the consequences of receiving low marks was discussed. A fourth said he was told by his wife that their child roams around the corridors of the playschool, so they tried to figure out what to do, which included talking to the teacher. A fifth said that they discussed that the child doesn't pay attention to her studies, and instead spends her time playing with her uncle and watching cartoons.

Among rural respondents, there was again a difference between fathers in Jharkhand and in other states. In rural Jharkhand, more than half of the fathers had discussed the child's education in the last week. Just as in urban Jharkhand, some of the topics discussed were the child's admission into school and academic progress. While the child's enrollment in school, attention to studying and marks were also mentioned as topics of discussion by rural respondents in Karnataka and Maharashtra, the interview results indicate that these topics were not discussed by fathers in those states as often as in Jharkhand. In contrast, only one father in rural UP described the child's education as a topic of discussion.

Aside from the child's education, there were several other topics that fathers mentioned discussing. Of these, the three most common (in descending order) were the child's food, clothing, and whether to take the child out. For example, one father said that he remembered discussing his son's poor appetite, and that to get him to eat he has to be shown cartoons on the phone.





“

I was talking to my wife yesterday...We admitted him [our son] only a month ago...he has been to the playschool 7-8 days. He roams around during that time [at the playschool]...So, we discussed how he will be able to study if he continues to do that...We discussed this with the teacher too.

30 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 3 YEAR OLD BOY
IN URBAN JHARKHAND

4.1.5. The Father's Role In The Family (Now and Then)

Sections 4.1.1 to 4.1.4 have focused exclusively on the relationship between the father and his early years child, exploring the father's involvement with the child and the satisfaction it gives him, as well as his aspirations and concerns. However, the father's involvement with the child is also shaped by the roles of the other members of the family, and the expectations that they have of the father. This section therefore focuses on the family's expectations of the father (from his perspective), as well as his role in the family vis-à-vis the other members. The family's expectations of the father were explored in Phase 3, while the roles of family members were explored in Phases 1 and 2.

Urban fathers said that there were two main expectations that the family had of them. The first expectation was to provide for the family financially. Not surprisingly, inflation and the lack of work opportunities (especially during the COVID-19 lockdown) were mentioned as challenges to meeting this expectation.

The second expectation was that the father would make decisions regarding medical treatment for the child and his/her education. In the case of the latter, this also involved enrolling the child in school. The challenges mentioned in making these decisions were both financial, and related to the multiple options available in the market for both the child's medical treatment and education.





“

"We wanted to get him into an English medium school in the future. But the problem is that the annual fee for an English medium school is about 40-50,000...It's not possible."

29 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 6 YEAR OLD BOY IN URBAN MAHARASHTRA

An important observation is that only 2 fathers said that their families expected them to spend time with the child. On the one hand this is positive, since it indicates that fathers interact with the child (as was demonstrated in section 4.1.1) voluntarily and/or because they enjoy doing so. On the other hand this is negative, because it is possible that attempts by stakeholders outside the family to influence fathers to spend more time with their children will not be successful unless this expectation is reinforced by family members.

Providing for the family financially was also an expectation that rural fathers said their families had of them, and they faced similar challenges as their urban counterparts. However, fewer rural than urban fathers said that their families expected them to make decisions regarding medical treatment for the child and his/her education. Given that this finding is surprising, it was triangulated with the responses of fathers in Phase 1, to a question on how they believed they should support their child’s development.

Both the responses from Phases 1 and 3 confirmed that rural fathers believed that they should be involved in their child’s education in multiple ways, with less of a focus on school enrollment alone. For example, one father said that he believes he should enquire about his son’s studies, and that both parents should discuss the child’s potential and how to improve it. Another father said that he should keep track of what’s happening at the child’s school, and visit the school once a month.

Despite these differences, for both urban and rural fathers one of the main expectations that they said their families had of them was that they should provide for the family financially. In this regard, this study also investigated whether the father was therefore responsible for shopping for the child. In Phase 2, fathers were asked about who was responsible for making most of the purchases for the child.

Both urban and rural fathers most commonly said that they were responsible for making purchases for the child. When



FIGURE II: PURCHASES FOR THE CHILD



I will ensure she goes to a good school. And keep track of what's happening at the school, visiting her school once a month (paraphrased).

26 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD GIRL IN RURAL UTTARAKHAND



“

My wife doesn't know anything. I buy everything.

39 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN DELHI

asked what they had last purchased for their child, school supplies, clothing and accessories, and toys were often mentioned. Some rural fathers mentioned educational toys such as a color wheel, abacus, and game of digits. Other items bought were special foods like ice-cream, fruit, or biscuits.

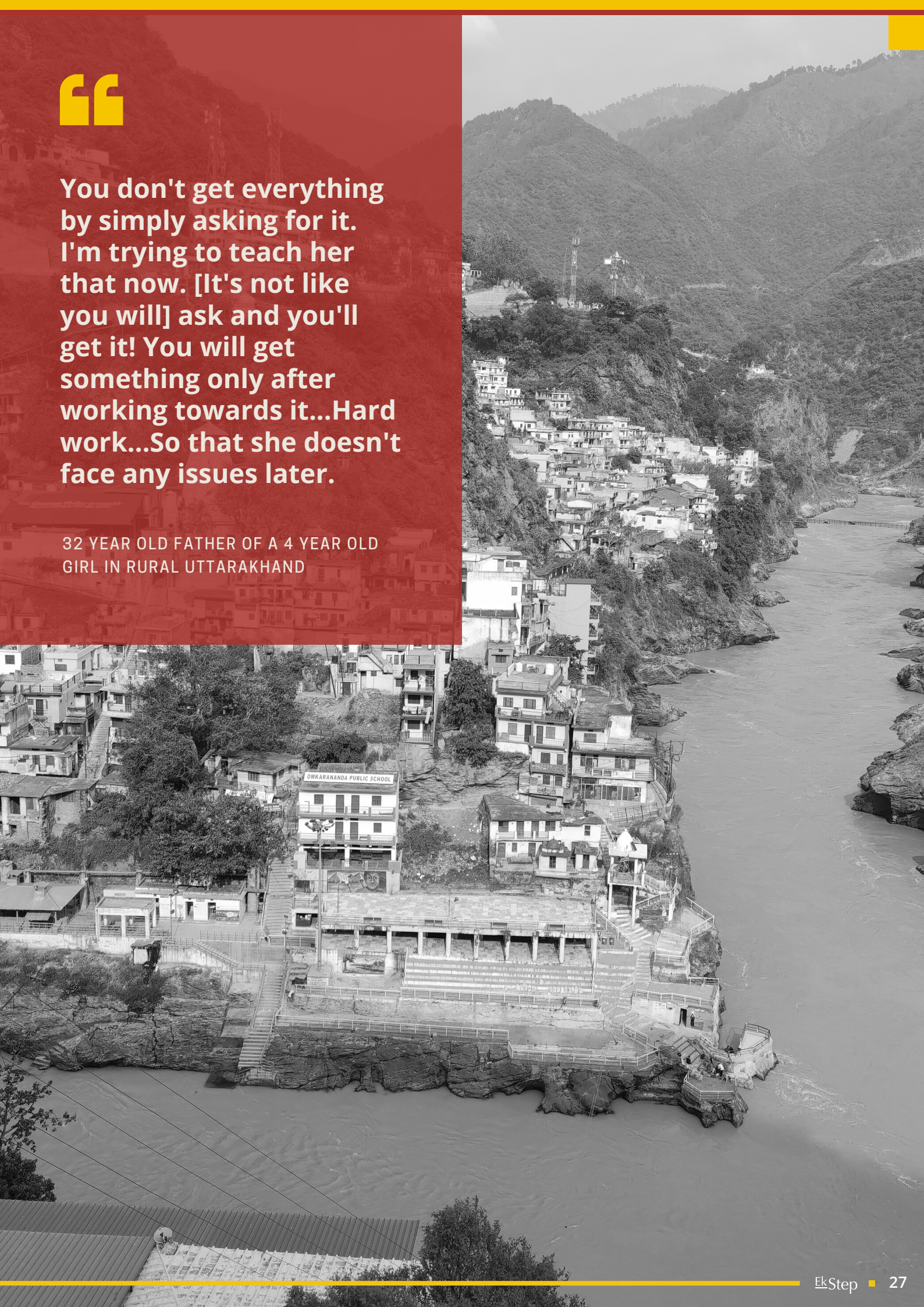
Some fathers either shared the responsibility for making purchases for the child with their wives, or saw shopping for the child as the wife's responsibility alone. The only other family members mentioned as responsible for making purchases for the child were his/her grandparents or uncle. While some fathers were therefore not primarily responsible for making purchases for the child, overall their responses reflected their perception of themselves as the financial provider in the family.

In fact, a majority of rural fathers explicitly said that it was their responsibility to fulfill the child's needs. However, one rural father had a contrary opinion. His unusual response, which emphasized the father's responsibility to teach the value of hard work rather than just provide financially, is below.



You don't get everything by simply asking for it. I'm trying to teach her that now. [It's not like you will] ask and you'll get it! You will get something only after working towards it...Hard work...So that she doesn't face any issues later.

32 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 4 YEAR OLD GIRL IN RURAL UTTARAKHAND



Just as this study explored fathers' beliefs of what was expected of them (in Phase 3), what fathers expected of other family members responsible for their child's development was also researched (Phases 1 and 2). In urban Jharkhand, Karnataka and Maharashtra, respondents believed that within the family it was either both parents or the mother alone who were responsible for their child's development.

Fathers described many individual responsibilities of the mother, and they were classified into 3 categories.

The first category were responsibilities related to maintaining a routine for the child, which were the most mentioned.

These responsibilities were accompanying the child to school and back, feeding and bathing the child, taking the child out and putting him/her to bed. While the findings in section 4.1.1 indicated that fathers in urban Jharkhand were relatively more involved than their counterparts in other states in these activities, they nevertheless saw them as primarily the responsibility of the mother.

The second category of responsibilities mentioned (again in order of frequency) were related to making sure that the child is studying well, and becomes an educated and good human being. While urban fathers expected to choose a school for the child and enroll him/her, mothers

were expected to be responsible for whether the child was in fact gaining an education. Other responses in this category were that the mother should teach the child right and wrong, and keep him/her away from bad influences.

The third category of responsibilities were related to bonding emotionally with the child. These responsibilities were that the mother should be caring, and should encourage the child. Other responsibilities of the mother that were mentioned in Phase 2 but not 1 were teaching the child to speak, as well as playing with and disciplining the child. However, in both Phases 1 and 2 mothers' roles as "routine keepers", especially with respect to feeding and bathing their children, were emphasized by fathers over their other roles.

Interestingly, the majority of rural fathers believed that both parents are responsible for the child's development, rather than the mother alone. This finding (along with the results discussed earlier in this section) indicate that rural fathers perceived child-rearing as a shared responsibility requiring the close involvement of both parents to a greater extent than their urban counterparts. Among the minority of rural fathers who believed that the mother is primarily responsible for the child's development, her responsibilities were



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"I used to play with her to make her eat. I also took her to temples [before the child turned 3]. I drop her at school when my wife is busy. [My daughter and I] still play together. And it has always been my responsibility to take her to the hospital when she is not well".

40 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD GIRL IN RURAL KARNATAKA

again seen as maintaining a routine, followed next by being actively involved in the child's academics (values education was not mentioned), and last by emotionally bonding with and playing with the child.

Despite some differences such as those in the paragraph above, the inference arrived at from interviewing respondents about their responsibilities and concerns was that both urban and rural fathers shared a preoccupation with their child's education. Assuming that this inference was correct, fathers should have become much more involved in the child's education after the child turned 3, as this is the age at which enrolling the child in pre-school becomes a possibility. To test this inference, respondents were asked about whether their responsibilities as a father, and involvement in decision-making about the child, had changed since the child had turned 3. Unfortunately, there were no regions in which both these questions were asked and answered consistently. However, the data available indicates that the father's responsibilities for the child cannot be understood in isolation from those of the mother.

As discussed earlier, fathers believe that the main roles of the mother are to maintain the child's routine, and to be

actively involved in the child's education. In addition (according to fathers), mothers' roles have not changed over time, and are the same now as they were before the child was 3. For fathers who believe that it is the mother who is primarily responsible for the child's development, it is possible that they see their own role as limited to supplementing what the mother is already providing. This could be the perspective of some fathers who said that their own role had not changed after their child turned 3.

That fathers believe that their involvement is shaped by the mother's role was even more evident when they were asked about making decisions for the child. None of the fathers who said that they were more involved in making decisions about the child now than before he/she turned 3 related this change to pre-school enrollment. Instead, they said that they either weren't involved earlier because other family members took all the decisions, or because they were away from the child when he/she was younger (living separately or working long hours).

Given that fathers saw their primary role as providing financially for the child, the majority of them said that their wives should either be involved in or primarily responsible for making decisions about the child, as well as his/her routine, education, and multiple other aspects of his/her development.



When the mother did everything, what was there for the father to do? If anything was required, I would bring it [before the child turned 3]...[Now] I sit with him, watch television with him, play with him and also study with him.

30 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN URBAN MAHARASHTRA

In urban Jharkhand, Karnataka and Maharashtra, approximately half of the fathers said that either they made decisions about the child jointly with their wife, or they at least consulted her. Fathers who did not involve their wives in decision-making most commonly said that they made decisions on their own. While overall the results from urban UP were not clear, a few respondents in that region said that they made decisions jointly with their fathers. A few fathers in urban Maharashtra also said that decisions were made by the extended family.

The results were similar for rural fathers in all regions, including UP. In UP, fathers most often said that their wives were involved in decisions about the child, and a few said that their wife made certain decisions alone. Examples of decisions that their wives had taken alone were related to rituals and enrolling the child in the *anganwadi*.

4.1.6. The Child’s “School” and the Father

Given that the majority of fathers said they involve their wives in decision-making about the child, to fully understand how decisions about preschool enrollment were made the research would have benefited from interviewing mothers as well. However, interviewing fathers alone was nevertheless useful for its insights into whether they believe that the early years are important for learning. These insights were then triangulated with their responses to a more direct question on the same topic. **The importance of understanding whether fathers believe that the early years are critical for learning was to identify which of their beliefs can be leveraged, and which need to be shifted (one of the purposes of this research).**

The questions on pre-school enrollment decisions were asked to fathers in Phase 3. In Phases 1 and 2, because of the recruitment strategy (see section 3 for context), the sample was biased towards fathers with children in public pre-schools and schools. To understand the full range of pre-school options available to fathers, and how they choose between them, it was more appropriate to explore these questions with Phase 3 respondents who were not recruited through parent engagement programs.

Analyzing the responses of these fathers was challenging because of some of the terms they used. For example, they often used the term “school” to refer to both pre-school and school. The term, “private anganwadi” was also used, which is puzzling given that anganwadis are government-run childcare centers that provide a range of services, including pre-school non-formal education. However, it was assumed that the term referred to a private preschool.

Nevertheless, it was determined that of the urban fathers interviewed, the majority had chosen to enroll the child in pre-school before Class 1. The pre-schools attended were mostly private, and were referred to as playschool, kindergarten, “private anganwadi”, just pre-school or nursery. However, a substantial minority among the children were not enrolled in any type of learning institution, and the interviews sought to determine whether this was by choice or for lack of a better alternative.

Among rural fathers, approximately two-thirds of their children were enrolled in preschool, while only one-third were at home. The distribution between public and



"We haven't admitted the child to a school yet...I believe that the age until 4-5 years is the age for kids to play. So, we don't send him to the playschool...We spend between half an hour to an hour with him every day. We teach him how to write. We will directly admit him to UKG or 1st grade once he has learnt writing."

35 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 4 YEAR OLD BOY IN URBAN JHARKHAND



private pre-schools was difficult to determine based on their responses. However, ASER 2019 'Early Years'⁸ found that among 4- and 5-year old rural children who are enrolled in some type of educational institution, 56.8% of girls and 50.4% of boys are in government pre-schools or schools, while 43.2% of girls and 49.6% of boys are in private pre-schools or schools.

Among rural fathers whose child was not enrolled in any pre-school, unlike their urban counterparts only a few said that the child can be taught at home before Class 1. One of these fathers said that in the early years the child should not feel the pressure of going to school, but should have freedom instead. Nevertheless, this father also said that once his son starts going to school, if his teachers are supportive (i.e. do not discriminate against children who are slow learners), they have an important role to play in the child's development as well. Other rural fathers said that their child is too young to be enrolled in a learning institution, or that costs were a factor. A few rural fathers who were sending their child to preschool said that he/she also learns from the family.

Both urban and rural respondents who had chosen to send their child to pre-school were asked about the factors that they considered. While only a few responses were received from either urban or rural fathers, among the former some of the main factors they said they considered were the costs, medium of instruction and quality of education (in no particular order). Not all fathers said they would prefer to send their child to an English medium school, which was the expected response. Some fathers said that they had deliberately chosen to send their child to a school that taught both in English and the local language. The explanation of one father, whose child is currently in Class 1 in a private school (but who said she was earlier enrolled in a balwadi on the same premises), is on the next page.

In addition to the costs, medium of instruction and quality of education, another main factor that was mentioned was the availability of non-academic opportunities. These consisted of sports and dance classes, and the opportunity to play. A very insightful response that was received from a father in urban Jharkhand illustrates how he chose a school that focuses on learning both through studying and playing.

8. ASER is a nation-wide household survey that provides data on schooling and learning for a representative sample of children across rural India. ASER 'Early Years' reports on the pre-schooling or schooling status of children in the age group of 4 to 8 and, in addition, explores their performance on some competencies that international research has identified as important predictors of future success.



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Most children go to English medium schools...Since all of us had learnt in a Marathi medium school, we initially felt we should enroll her in a Marathi medium school too. But no good Marathi medium schools exist today in Kolhapur city. So, we enrolled her in a semi-English school (paraphrased).

42 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 6 YEAR OLD GIRL IN URBAN MAHARASHTRA

That urban fathers believed that the preschool should offer non-academic opportunities is surprising, when compared to the results of FSG's customer research for PIPE, which is its Program to Improve Private Early Education. This research was conducted with 4,407 low-income families in 8 Indian cities, and concluded that "good" early child education is often viewed in purely traditional academic terms, and constitutes regular homework, exams and tuition classes. One of the findings that supported this conclusion was that 98% of parents ask for developmentally inappropriate preschool education such as regular homework and exams. A possible explanation for this discrepancy between the FSG research and the current study is that in the former, more than 90% of the interviewees were mothers (the primary caregivers of the children).

In the current study, among rural fathers only one mentioned the importance accorded to non-academic opportunities as a factor to be considered. This respondent cited the focus on sports as one of the reasons he chose a government rather than private school for his child. His quote is mentioned in the next page.

Rural fathers also mentioned two factors that influenced their decision-making, which their urban counterparts did not. The first was that some fathers said that the decision of which playschool to send their child to was made for them by the fact that there weren't many options where they were living. The second was that some rural fathers said that they considered the experiences of other families with children when deciding which preschool to send the child to and when. Apart from these factors, the costs, medium of instruction and quality of education were equally considered by rural and urban respondents.

In Phases 1 and 2, some fathers had mentioned that their child attends a coaching / tuition class, and therefore this was explicitly asked about in Phase 3. In urban Jharkhand, Maharashtra and UP, the research found that while not a common practice, some respondents had enrolled their child in a coaching or tuition class. Among rural fathers, only in Jharkhand were there some respondents who said that they had enrolled their child in a coaching or tuition class.

In general, the results indicated that the coaching / tuition class was in addition to the pre-school or school that the child attended. One father explained that his daughter,



The most important point is that he is a young child and playing is more important for him than studying [now]. So, we consider[ed] a school that makes children do both [i.e. study and play]...he can't learn a lot now; we can't pressurize him mentally. So, we checked if they have play/sports facilities. And the school shouldn't be one that pressurises students. Hence, we chose a school that can make students do both and can therefore enable the child's physical as well as mental development...He can learn only through play. We can't make him sit and either write or mug up. We considered these points before choosing a school.

31 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN URBAN JHARKHAND



Government schools are the most affordable and have also developed to provide better education. Teachers are well-spoken and respectful. They nurture and develop children's interests in sports and education equally. In private schools, children are just hammered to study. There is no focus on sports. Of what use is such education? Government school children also play sports, are more active and grow holistically.

32 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN RURAL MAHARASHTRA





They're getting a lot of homework from school these days and it's not possible to explain everything [to the child] at home. And I don't have enough time either. So, the tuition class is very important (paraphrased).

34 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 6 YEAR OLD GIRL IN URBAN JHARKHAND

although only in kindergarten, receives so much homework that the family finds it difficult to find enough time to help her with it, and therefore she is enrolled in a tuition class. His response is on the previous page.

Similarly, another father described an arduous schedule for his 6 year old, which involved going to school and tuition class from 1 to 9 p.m. In the morning he is given some play time as an incentive to study, but has to do his homework as well. While the interview results indicate that these children are outliers, it is nevertheless of concern that they are in multiple learning institutions, and receive copious amounts of homework, at such a young age.

In summary, it is evident that even fathers who were not participants in parent engagement programs believed that the early years are important for learning, based on 2 findings. Firstly, although pre-school enrollment is not in itself an indicator that fathers believe the early years are important for learning, nevertheless it is important to note that the majority of both rural and urban respondents had enrolled their children in pre-school. Secondly and more importantly, one of the main factors that both urban and rural fathers considered in the choice of pre-school was the quality of education.

However, the fathers who were interviewed for the current study placed less emphasis on the purely academic dimensions of quality, especially tuition classes, than the parents who participated in the FSG study.

4.1.7. The Father's Beliefs About Learning

One way in which this study investigated whether fathers believe that the early years are important for learning was through their attitudes towards preschool education, which were explored in section 4.1.6. The other way in which this question was investigated was through asking fathers about their own beliefs about what constitutes learning, why it is important and how best it can be achieved. Their responses are described in this section.

In addition, this section investigates a key contradiction found between what fathers believe children should learn and what they are teaching them, and explores the role the preschool plays in creating this dichotomy. This contradiction is that while fathers believe children should learn a range of skills, subjects and behaviors, 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. The Hindi, Kannada and Marathi words used in the interviews when asking about learning and teaching are in Table III.

TABLE III: TRANSLATING LEARNING AND TEACHING

ENGLISH	HINDI	KANNADA	MARATHI
Learning	Seekhna / सीखना	Kaliyabeku / ಕಲಿಯಬೇಕು	Shikale / शकिले
Teach	Sikhaya / सिखाया	Kalisiddiri / ಕಲಿಸಿದ್ಧಿರಾ	Shikawle / शकिवले

The overall inference that can be drawn from the responses to this series of questions is that fathers believed that developing mentally and physically, as well as learning positive values and behaviors, are all important in the early years. While the results indicate that urban and rural fathers share similar beliefs about learning and play, it was not possible to determine the weightage that individual fathers give to these 3 areas of development. The diversity of responses indicate that some fathers prioritize the child's mental development, others the child's physical development, and a third group the acquisition of desirable values and behaviors.

In addition, what was striking is that when asked what their child should be learning, the fathers interviewed in Phase 2 named a range of skills, subjects and behaviors that they thought were important. These included learning the alphabet and how to count, but also extended to the arts (drawing, music and dancing), games and sports, as well as developing good habits such as eating well and being neat and disciplined. To an extent, what fathers did with the child was consistent with what they believed the child should be learning in the early years.

To contribute to their child learning good behavior, fathers said that they taught their child how to treat people with respect. One father said that the way he teaches his son to treat others with respect is by doing the same with him. His quote is below.



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They [children] should talk to everyone with kindness, and they should give respect to everyone. I address my son with respect and expect the same from him. This is how he will learn and treat people with respect.

35 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 4 YEAR OLD BOY IN URBAN KARNATAKA

To contribute to the child’s physical development, fathers played with their children. What playing consisted of for fathers, and their beliefs about it, are elaborated on in section 4.1.8. However, a key insight of this research is that most fathers did not believe that play was a way to teach the child, and to contribute to his/her mental development.

This study also observed that when asked what they taught their child, the range of responses from fathers narrowed to those focused on the alphabet, numbers and math tables. The key insight that has been drawn from these results is that while fathers aspire for their children to develop both mentally and physically (i.e. holistically) in the early years, the narrow focus of their teaching activities reflects the focus of their child’s preschool. Because many of fathers’ “assisting” activities revolve around the preschool, when preschools focus narrowly on teaching the alphabet and numbers, so do fathers.

Further insight into fathers’ beliefs about learning (distinct from those of the preschool) was gained by asking them what they believed the best way was for their child to learn. Because the question was open-ended, the responses ranged from the physical environment to the

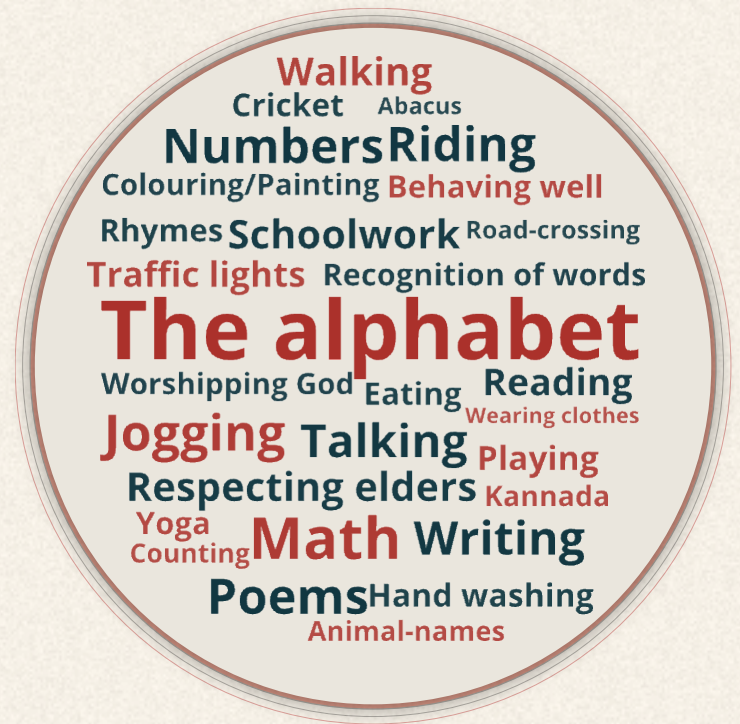


FIGURE III: WHAT FATHERS TEACH

pedagogic method, to who should teach the child, and the approach to teaching (the last two were only mentioned in some regions). In describing the approach to learning, one father said that they deliberately allow their child to make mistakes. A quote from this father is on the next page.

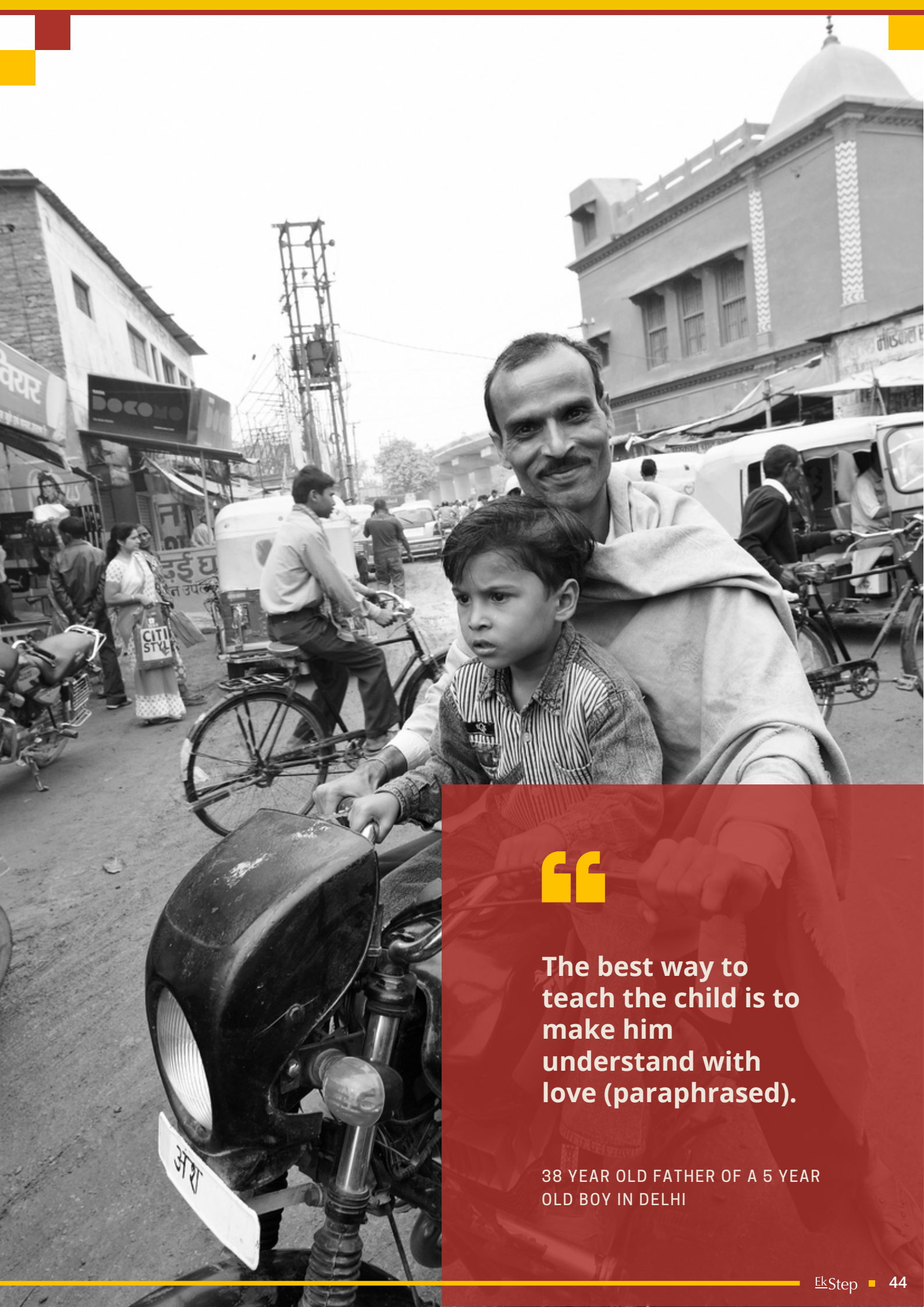
A response from another father was that, “the best way to teach the child is to make him understand with love”. “Teaching with love” was in contrast to giving the child due dates, and making him study for 4-5 hours at a stretch. This father went on to say that children can be taught through drawing or games.



"Whatever it may be that she's doing, we don't stop her. She should get the hang of it even if it's wrong. Then she will understand that it is wrong to do it this way".

32 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 4 YEAR OLD GIRL IN RURAL UTTARAKHAND





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The best way to teach the child is to make him understand with love (paraphrased).

38 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY IN DELHI

Another father said that the child should learn how to count and identify currency, and play can be one way to do that. As mentioned above, these responses (that identified play as a way to learn) were the exception rather than the rule. Other pedagogic methods mentioned were through rote or memorizing (for example poems), demonstration, worksheets with stories, visual methods and using technology. Some examples provided of how children can learn from technology were through videos and cartoons.

Some of the physical environments that urban fathers believed were conducive to learning were the “school” and tuition class, which were not surprising given their earlier responses. It is possible that “school” and tuition class also referred to the teacher, but he/she was mentioned less often than family members as people the child can learn best from. Some of the family members mentioned by both urban and rural fathers were the parents, and the child’s siblings or older cousins.

Unlike the majority, a few fathers had chosen to implement the method of learning that they thought was best, independent of the preschool’s focus. One urban father mentioned that his child uses Byju’s, which enables him to both study and have fun. This response is noteworthy because it is the only one that refers to a pedagogic method that involves self-study. **Answers to a question that explicitly asked fathers about whether the child learns on his/her own at this age or needs to be taught validated that most of them (urban and rural) believed the child needs to be taught, although a few rural fathers indicated that both ways of learning were necessary.**

Another group of fathers believed that the child is taught best from classes held outside and/or from nature, and used their own experiences teaching their child to illustrate. One such father in Karnataka was quoted in section 4.1.3. While only a few other fathers held this perspective, they were distributed across the western, eastern and southern regions.

One urban father (in Jharkhand) said that he talks to his daughter about farming and gives her information on the different kinds of animals and insects. He takes her to temples in the area to give her information about the appropriate behavior there. Another urban father (in Maharashtra) said that when he takes his daughter outside, she questions everything and that is how she learns. A rural father in Maharashtra had a remarkably similar response, and his quote is on the next page.



"He is a kid. The more he goes out the better it is for his health. I take him to the fields...'What is this?'...He asks me questions about everything".

34 YEAR OLD FATHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD BOY FROM RURAL MAHARASHTRA

In other words, these fathers believed that children learn best through observation or experience, which involves being outside and asking questions. That these fathers were from across the western, eastern and southern regions indicates that the promotion of such learning moments could resonate widely. It is possible that many fathers only require an affirmation that such beliefs and behaviors, which they are already subscribing to and practicing, are indeed some of the best ways for children to learn.

4.1.8. The Father's Beliefs About Play

Except for a few fathers who were able to put into practice their own beliefs, the majority limited their involvement in their child's learning to enrolling him/her in preschool, and then supporting the preschool through activities such as supervising the child's homework. In contrast, the results indicate that fathers were able to make more autonomous decisions about how they played with their child and how often, as this was an area in which neither the preschool nor their family had any expectations of them. In this context, that fathers played with their children at least once a week is indicative of the importance they gave to play, and/or the enjoyment they derived from it. While section 4.1.1 mentioned that fathers most commonly played cricket with their children, this section of the report describes the other games played in more detail.

Contrary to expectations, urban fathers played more outdoor than indoor games with their child. While rural fathers also played more outdoor than indoor games with their child, this is less surprising. Aside from cricket, some of the other outdoor games played were badminton, ball games and hide and seek. When fathers did play with their child indoors, some of the games mentioned were carrom and snakes and ladders.

Given that fathers described purchasing toys for their child (see section 4.1.5), it is not surprising that they mentioned playing with these toys as well. More specifically, urban fathers said they played with toy cars, guns and dolls with their child. "Found toys" were not commonly mentioned by either urban or rural fathers, but one father said that he and his child played with a tire, another said they had pillow fights, and a third said that the child played in the tub because he liked water.

Section 4.1.7 emphasized that fathers believed that play is largely important for their child's physical (rather than mental) development. However, it is interesting to note that the phone was one device that fathers used both to teach the child and to play, and cartoons were mentioned as a way to do both. When used exclusively for play, an activity that fathers and their children did on the phone together was watch dance videos. Car games were also played on the phone and/or TV.

It is important to note that while for the purpose of this analysis “sports and games” have been separated from “going out”, fathers considered both as part of play. Aside from the examples provided in section 4.1.1, the beach was one place that a father in Mumbai mentioned going to with his child. Taking the child out for a bike ride was also mentioned. Another activity that was difficult to categorize was talking to the child, which fathers commonly mentioned doing. These conversations were described as being about subjects such as the child’s school, friends, and what he/she did during the day, as well as about what the father had done during the day.

4.1.9. The Father’s Influencers

This research has found that aside from their roles as breadwinners in the family, fathers influence the lives of their early years children in multiple ways, but primarily through their involvement in educating, playing with, and making financial decisions for them. To promote changes in fathers’ beliefs, and consequently the decisions that they make for their early years children, as well as the ways they educate and play with them, it is also important to understand who fathers are in turn influenced by. To identify fathers’ influencers, fathers were asked about who they seek advice from in general, and who they engage with in discussions and decision-making about the child.

These responses provide strong evidence that the father’s wife is his key influencer in discussions and decision-making about the child. The only exception to this finding was that a few urban fathers said that either the child’s paternal grandfather has a key role to play in decision making about the child, or the whole family does (see section 4.1.5). Exceptions aside, these results indicate that to change fathers’ beliefs about the child, it is also important to engage with the beliefs of the child’s mother.

That the father's wife is his key influencer is a surprising finding, given what other research has found about the relationship between husbands and wives in India. The Pew Research Center's survey of 29,999 Indian adults found that approximately 90% of them 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 family¹⁰. These results indicate that while Indians believe that 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.

In support of this explanation, the results of the current study indicate that wives do not necessarily have as much influence over their husbands in other spheres as in parenting. While urban fathers most mentioned asking their wives for overall advice, rural fathers often asked their parents (in 3 regions) or their friends (Karnataka alone). It is possible that the father's greater reliance on his parents for advice in rural areas was because there were fewer nuclear families than in urban areas. While information on household composition was not collected systematically, responses to another question on who the child spends the most time with indicates that in rural areas, it is equally likely to be the grandparents as the mother. In contrast, a large majority of urban fathers said that the child spends the most time with the mother, indicating that most urban families were nuclear.

Finally, fathers were asked who they aspired to be like, either from among people around them or actors in films or on TV. Among urban fathers, there was a high degree of variation in their responses. Some mentioned actors, or the former president Abdul Kalam. Two fathers mentioned their own fathers.

Among rural fathers, in some regions few responses were received. Where fathers answered the question, some again mentioned actors they wanted to be like, or their fathers. However, the majority of fathers in rural Karnataka said they aspired to be like others they had seen (a friend, cousin or other relatives) who were earning well.

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4.1.10. Differences Among Fathers

In identifying differences among fathers, 2 approaches were used in this study. The first was to identify differences based on region, whether the father is an urban or rural resident, and the gender of his child. This study had anticipated that these 3 variables would influence fathers' perspectives and behavior (reflected in the sampling strategy used), and lead to patterns in their responses. The second approach was to identify patterns that were not anticipated in the research design.

In the earlier sections of the report, a number of differences in the perspectives and behavior of urban and rural fathers have been mentioned, which are summarized in Table IV. It is followed by a discussion of differences based on the other 2 variables. However, overall, the differences found between fathers based on the 3 variables were not stark.

Table IV (and the rest of this report) indicate that while there were differences between urban and rural fathers, they were outnumbered by the similarities. Nevertheless, whether the father was an urban or rural resident was a more important differentiator than regional location or his child's gender. There were only 2 examples in the report of unusual responses from specific regions, and no substantial evidence of negative discrimination against girls by their fathers.

In fact, while fathers (especially in Maharashtra) said that they were satisfied and/or happy to have a daughter, none said that they were happy to have a son alone. (1 urban father said that he was happy to have a boy and a girl). Since this study began with the assumption that son preference is still prevalent in India, the finding that fathers did not have lower expectations of, or negative sentiments towards, their daughters came as a surprise. As other research in countries with son preference has found, 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 boys¹¹.

TABLE IV: URBAN AND RURAL INSIGHTS

TOPIC	URBAN FATHERS	RURAL FATHERS
Father-Child Interactions	Playing was the most mentioned among the responses	Assisting and playing were equally mentioned among the responses
The Highlights of Fatherhood	Daily moments with their child were most mentioned among the responses	Daily moments and special events / milestones were equally mentioned among the responses
Concerns	The child's academic performance was a key concern	In addition to the child's academic performance, the ability to pay school fees was a key concern
Families' Expectations	Being the breadwinner of the family Making decisions regarding medical treatment for the child and his/her education	In addition to being the breadwinner of the family, being involved in their child's education in multiple ways Few rural fathers said they were expected to make decisions regarding medical treatment for the child and his/her education
Individuals Responsible for the Child's Development	The parents and the mother alone were equally mentioned among the responses	Both parents was the most mentioned among the responses
Fathers' Sources of Advice (not specifically on the child)	Their wives were the most mentioned among the responses	Their parents or friends were the most mentioned among the responses

However, the results from the Pew Research Center's survey (conducted in 2019-20) indicate that most Indians now think that it is important to have both a son and a daughter¹², and therefore it is possible that the preference for sons exclusively is no longer prevalent in India. While the results of the current study also indicate that fathers believe it is important to have daughters, this does not mean that they are preferred exclusively either. As of the 2011 census, there were 111 boys for every 100 girls born in India, a ratio that has been artificially widened due to sex-selective abortions¹³.

Although recent data suggests the gap between boys and girls born may be narrowing, the Pew Research Center survey found that on average, 4 in 10 Indians still believe that sex-selective abortions are somewhat or completely acceptable¹⁴. While the skewed sex ratio at birth and support for sex-selective abortions in India therefore remain of concern, national averages mask important inter-state differences in individuals' preferences for children of a particular gender. In Maharashtra, a greater percentage of respondents said that it was very important to have a daughter than a son¹⁵. This preference for daughters in Maharashtra was also reflected in the responses of the fathers in the current study.

Aside from the prevalence of fathers in Maharashtra who said that they were happy to have daughters, the other unique regional finding (unrelated to gender) was in response to a question about what fathers had discussed about their child, if anything, in the last week. More fathers in Jharkhand said that they had discussed their child's education in the last week than in other states. Beyond these unique responses to specific questions, there were no regional patterns discernible from the interview data. Similarly, there were no unanticipated patterns found in fathers' responses that were consistent across the 3 phases of research.

However, unanticipated patterns were found in fathers' responses to key questions in Phase I alone, on their beliefs, concerns and actions. Through these patterns, 5 types of fathers were identified. They are described in section 4.2.2, which also includes other insights on their beliefs, and the potential challenges in influencing their actions.

12. HOW INDIANS VIEW GENDER ROLES IN FAMILIES AND SOCIETY | PEW RESEARCH CENTER (PEWRESEARCH.ORG)

13. Ibid

14. Ibid

15. Ibid

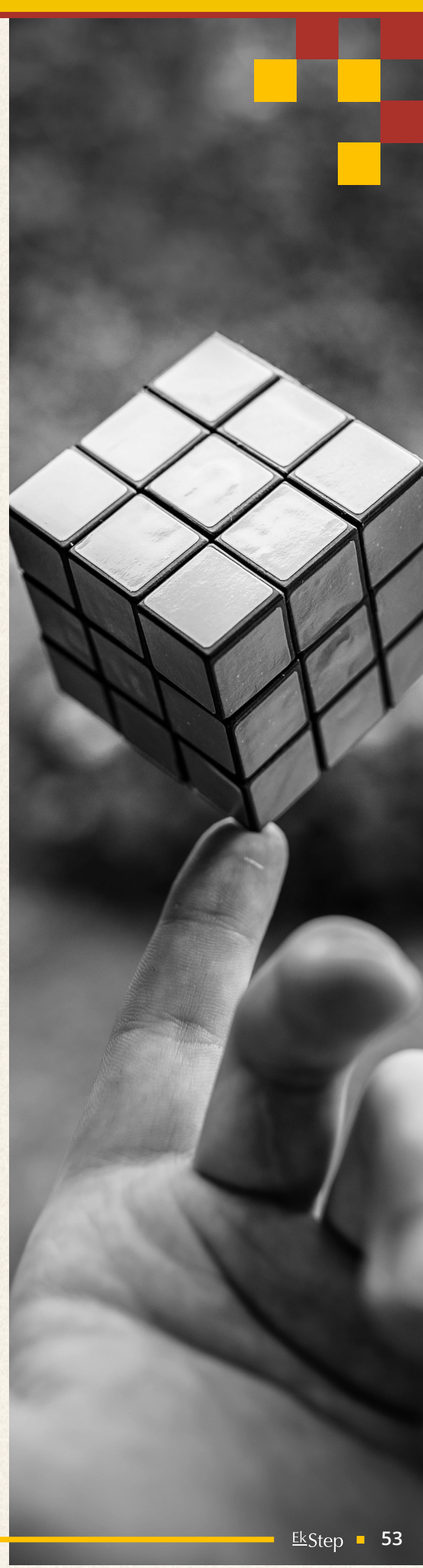
4.2 CONCLUSIONS


4.2.1 Surprises

As mentioned in section 4.1.10, no substantial evidence of negative discrimination against girls by their fathers emerged from the analysis, and this was the first surprise of the study. 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. 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)¹⁶, in which case the lack of discrimination against girls found in the current study is not unexpected after all.

The second finding of the current study that was surprising, which was also related to gender, was that the father's wife is his key influencer in discussions and decision-making about the child. This finding is unexpected given the assumption that in most Indian families, wives are expected to obey their husbands, and therefore it is the husband who influences the wife rather than the other way around. In this case, this assumption was validated by the Pew Research Center's work, which found that 9 in 10 Indians agree that a wife must always obey her husband. The findings of the current study are therefore especially surprising, because not only did most fathers

16. Ibid





indicate that their wives were their key influencers in the sphere of parenting, but (among urban fathers particularly) in other spheres as well.

Related to the second surprise, the third was that fathers did not uniformly value preschools that gave their children regular homework and exams. Comparing this finding from the current study with FSG's customer research on PIPE indicates a possible divergence between what mothers and fathers value from preschools. While a finding reported by FSG was that 98% of parents ask for developmentally inappropriate preschool education such as regular homework and exams¹⁷, their research was conducted primarily with mothers. In other words, it is possible that mothers value preschools that give their children regular homework and exams more than fathers do. However, given the key role that mothers play in influencing fathers on their children, the belief that preschools should give children regular homework and exams will have to be tackled to ensure parental demand for more developmentally appropriate preschool education, regardless of which parent is targeted.

4.2.2. Insights and Challenges

The variations found among fathers in their expectations of the child's preschool become more evident when the findings on their beliefs about their child's education, concerns and actions were analyzed. As mentioned earlier, 5 types of fathers were identified on the basis of their responses to the Phase 1 interview questions. A majority (but not all) of the fathers interviewed in this phase were matched to 1 of the 5 categories, which are on the next page.

As mentioned earlier, there were no unanticipated patterns found among respondents that were consistent across the 3 phases of research, and this categorization of fathers into 5 types was based only on the Phase 1 responses. In addition, across the 3 phases of research, no distinct patterns were discernible among fathers of girls and boys, and in different regions. Finally, while there were differences between urban and rural fathers, they were outnumbered by the similarities. Given this context, it is appropriate to end this report with the common beliefs and challenges that emerged across fathers, as well as the opportunities to engage them.

FATHER
TYPE

1

“I believe that my child should be in preschool / school at this age, but am worried about paying the fees. I therefore focus on earning money. Even if I want to spend more time with my child, I am not able to because I need to earn”.

FATHER
TYPE

2

“I believe that my child should be in preschool / school at this age. Since my child is in preschool / school, I don't have any worries. In the time I have with the child, I enjoy playing with him / her”.

FATHER
TYPE

3

“I believe that my child should be in preschool / school at this age. Although my child is in preschool / school, I still worry about his / her education. However, I believe it is the school's responsibility. I spend my time playing with the child”.

FATHER
TYPE

4

“I believe that my child should be in preschool / school at this age. Although my child is in preschool / school, I still worry about his / her education. Therefore, I spend some of my time helping teach the child”.

FATHER
TYPE

5

“I believe my child should play or do whatever he / she likes at this age. Therefore I don't have any worries, and I enjoy playing with the child.”



At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that arriving at common beliefs and challenges (as well as opportunities to engage) across fathers does involve a certain degree of generalization. In particular, Belief 3 (listed on the next page) is only subscribed to by type 4 fathers. (However, more fathers were categorized as type 4 than the other types). 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.

A key finding of this research was that fathers aspire for their children to develop both mentally and physically (i.e. holistically) in the early years. In addition, some fathers are able to name a range of skills, subjects and behaviors that the child should be learning at this age. Yet, despite this awareness, fathers most commonly said that they only taught their children the alphabet and counting.

The research results indicate that this contradiction arises because of Belief 6. Many of the “assisting” activities that fathers do with their child revolve around school, such as asking the child what he/she learnt, and supervising his/her homework. Therefore, when preschools focus narrowly on teaching the alphabet and numbers, so do fathers.

While fathers believe that pre-schools should provide their child with a quality education, it is possible that they do not have a vision of what that quality education should consist of. It is also possible that fathers do have a vision of the holistic, quality education that they would like to provide their child, but are not able to find preschools in the area that are within their budget and meet their requirements. These findings indicate that to address this issue, two strategies (to enhance both supply and demand) are required. 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.

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.

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.

Two beliefs that should be shifted, particularly for fathers to create learning moments and spaces through play, were also identified. These beliefs are below.

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.

However, there are 2 challenges that any initiative to engage fathers in playful learning should take into account.

The first challenge, that was mentioned by fathers themselves, was their long work hours. Fathers who work long hours cannot devote additional time to playful learning, and it must instead be incorporated into (or replace) existing interactions with the child. The second challenge is that not only do fathers work long hours but they also believe they should, as they perceive their main role in the family as being the financial provider.

The second challenge is related to, but distinct from, the first. 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.

4.2.3. Opportunities

Based on the results of this study, a few opportunities to enhance fathers' engagement in their children's learning have been identified, which are aligned with the strategies described in section 4.2.2. Of the 2 strategies described in section 4.2.2 that are directly relevant to fathers, the first is to educate them in how to choose a preschool that focuses on the child's holistic development. In the research among urban fathers, choosing a preschool / school for the child from the multiple options available in the market was observed as a challenge. An inference is that therefore, fathers facing this challenge will welcome guidance on this choice. However, given the observation that wives are a key influencer for urban fathers, it is also inferred that guidance on choosing a preschool should be provided to both parents and not just one.

Apart from providing guidance on how to choose a preschool, the other strategy in section 4.2.2 that is directly relevant to fathers is to encourage them to engage in playful learning with their child. A key observation from this research is that most of this "play" between father and child currently happens outdoors. This involves fathers both playing outdoor sports and games (such as cricket or hide and seek) with their child, and taking the child out. These times of play constitute critical learning moments, in which the

child can ask questions and display curiosity (which some fathers already encourage their child to do).

Currently, fathers “play” with their children at least once a week, and for many it is a daily practice. Aside from these specific play times, this study also identified two other opportunities to create daily learning moments. The first is during mealtimes. Both eating with and talking to the child were reported by fathers (although not necessarily together), and based on this observation, it is inferred that 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. In particular, fathers who are drivers or delivery agents could take advantage of this opportunity to create learning moments for their child.

The learning spaces that correspond to the moments described above are the outdoors and the home. The third is places of commerce, during shopping trips which can constitute a weekly or monthly learning moment between father and child. Given the observation that the majority of fathers are responsible for shopping for their child, it is inferred that these trips provide the opportunity for children to learn about counting and comparisons between objects, such as on the basis of color and size. (An assumption is being made that most fathers are not shopping exclusively online, especially in low-income households.) While all three places can be learning spaces for children, based on the results of this research it is recommended that when encouraging father-child engagement the emphasis should be on the outdoors.

Despite these opportunities, there is a risk that fathers will not engage their child sufficiently in playful learning because they believe that their main role is to earn for the family. Most fathers also believe that their families do not expect them to spend time with the child, and that being the breadwinner is sufficient to fulfill the family’s expectations. However, it is possible that had mothers been asked directly, they would have expressed a dissatisfaction with the status quo that was not evident from fathers’ responses.

Therefore, along with the strategies described in this report, it is 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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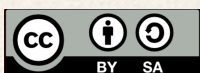
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