



Policy Brief: Marginalized Women with Young Children Need Crèches to Join Paid Work

Summary

Women's labor force participation rate has been an area of concern in India for many decades. Similarly, childcare has continued to remain responsibilities of women in families. A study conducted by Mobile Creches explores the relationship between women's childcare responsibilities and participation in paid work. It unravels how availability of childcare services enables paid work participation and improves economic conditions for women. It also establishes that childcare responsibilities within families restrain women from joining paid work.

Introduction

Mobile Creches (MC) has been running worksite and neighborhood crèches in the National Capital Region (NCR) for last five decades. It has also engaged with the government in developing policies and programs on centre and family based early childhood care and development. In order to understand the need for crèches among women in multiple marginalization, as an enabler to join and retain paid employment, MC conducted a study. **The purpose of this policy brief is to highlight the findings of the study and provide policy recommendations based on the same.**

Research approach

India has one of the lowest female labor force participation (FLFP) rates among developing countries. It stands at 24.53% in 2018–19. While falling work participation rates for women has remained a persistent subject of debate, several studies that have delved deep into identifying the determinants of FLFP in India, state that women with young children are less likely to be in the labor force (IWWAGE April 2021ⁱ, Chaudhary and Verick, 2014ⁱⁱ; Das and Žumbyté, 2017ⁱⁱⁱ; ILO 2018^{iv}).

Motivated and informed by these findings, Mobile Creches conducted a study. This policy brief focusses on the following integrally connected objectives of the study:

- a) To understand the inter-linkage between access to childcare and women's ability to engage in paid work
- b) To explore the perceived needs for childcare facilities and crèches among women from socially and economically marginalized communities to enable them to join paid work

The scope of the policy brief is thus limited to the above-mentioned objectives.

The study adopted a mixed methods approach in collecting primary data. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Odisha. Stratified sampling method was used for sampling and questionnaires were used to collect quantitative

data. For collecting qualitative data, Focused Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used. A total of 1128 women with children under six years of age were interviewed. They belonged to three categories. The numbers and categories are as follows:

- 225 employed women with access to crèches (EAC)
- 340 employed women with no access to crèches (ENAC)
- 563 women not in employment (NE)

The study established that women perceived crèches as an enabler because it allowed them to be financially independent by sharing their childcare responsibilities. Absence of crèches acted as a barrier to access paid work. Primary data was collected from both rural and urban settings. There was not much difference found between rural and urban data, hence, consolidated findings are presented in this policy brief.

Multiple forms of deprivations observed among the respondents

The respondents were mainly young women with young children and 70% of the respondents were in the age group of 20 to 29. Ninety nine percent of the respondents had a family income below Rs 20000. Intersectionality of marginalization were observed among the respondents. The table 1 provides a gist of the multiple deprivations observed.

Table 1: Multiple deprivations among respondents (%)

Indicators	Percentage
Percentage of respondents with family income below Rs 10000 a month	64%
Percentage of respondents belonging to SC, ST and OBC communities	70%
Percentage of respondents with education below Class 10 th	77%
Percentage of migrants	29%

Intense childcare needs in the families surveyed

The families were found to be both small and large with 43% comprising of two adults and rest had four or more adults. On the basis of age-wise dependency on mothers, number of children were grouped as highly dependent (0-3 years), moderately dependent (4-6 years), less dependent (7-14 years), and least dependent (15-18 years). The table 2 shows that a significantly high proportion of respondents had children in the highly dependent (0-3 years) and moderately dependent (4- 6 years) age group.

Table 2: Number of children and levels of dependency

No. of children	Highly Dependent	Moderately Dependent	Less Dependent	Least Dependent
1	743	639	289	51
2	98	125	92	25
3	4	16	7	6

Crèches enabled paid work and improved income

The women interviewed clearly identified the link between access to childcare services for being able to join paid work. **There were a total of 225 employed women who accessed childcare services, of them 34.7% said they were able to join paid work only after having access to crèches. On the other hand, 88.7% of women not in employment (NE) said they were not in employment because of their childcare responsibilities.**

Most of the EAC respondents (61%) were accessing NGO services and 21% were accessing crèches run by the government. Figure 1 shows the different types of crèches accessed by the respondents. It shows that women were accessing crèches run by state, market, employers and communities indicating involvement of multiple players, even though in small numbers.

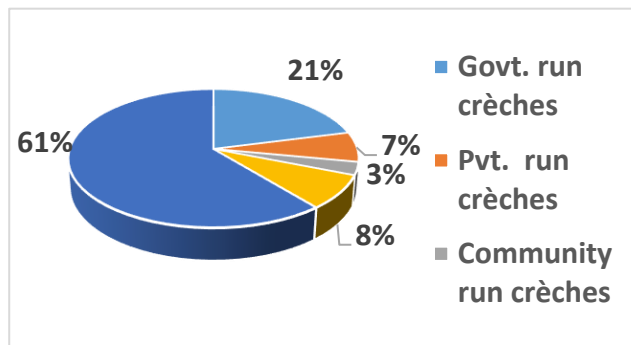


Figure 1: Types of crèches used by EAC women

Of the total 225 women, 88% responded

that their income level has improved after accessing crèche facility. The range of increase in income for these respondents was Rs.1000-6000. **The average increase in income was 108%. Women reported that they were now earning more as a family and were able to concentrate more on work and meet the needs of the employers. They were also able to work for more hours.**

The above findings corroborate the findings from other research studies. In an impact assessment of childcare cooperative model by ASK in 2011, it was found out that women who were sending their children to Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) childcare centers were able to work more hours during the day and work more days during the month allowing them to earn a higher income and bolster their savings.^v

Crèche was considered as a top enabler by EAC women for joining paid work. A substantial percentage of them (86%) shared that access to crèches enabled them to do paid work. A whopping 96.6% of all women (EAC, ENAC and NE) shared that access to crèches or similar facilities would enable more women to start paid work. In total of 97.8% women in paid work (EAC and ENAC) and 96.9% not working women (NE) mentioned that crèche was an essential requirement.

Non-access to crèches restrained paid work or led to compromised childcare arrangements

There were two groups of women who were not accessing crèches, one of the groups comprised on employed women (ENAC) and the other had women who were not in paid work (NE). Childcare responsibilities emerged as the main reason for not being in paid employment. 88.7% of NE women shared that childcare responsibility was the main reasons for their unemployed status.

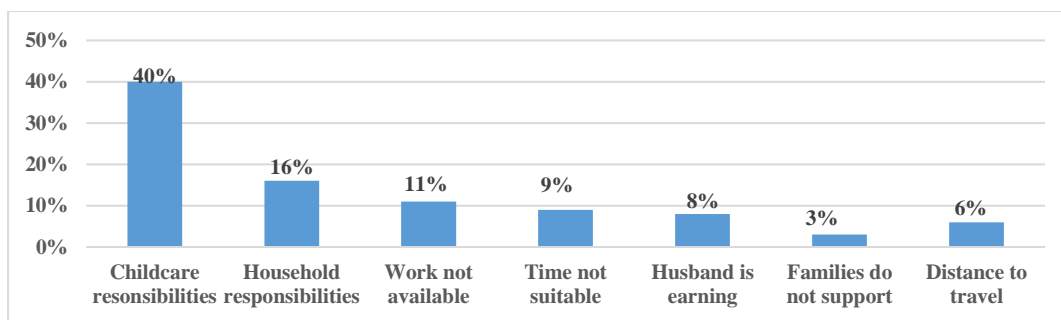


Figure 2: Reasons for not being in employment for NE women (%)

Of the 563 NE women, 271 were in paid employment earlier. 86% of them had left paid work due to childcare responsibilities and 57% due to family responsibilities. 73.2% of women were of the opinion that women do give up paid work after childbirth.

Women who were currently working but not availing crèche (ENAC) attributed two important reasons for not accessing crèches:

- They felt it was their duty to care for their children
- Elders in the family do not allow it
- Quality of services and apprehensions around them such as poor hygiene, poor quality of food, discrimination on the basis of caste etc.

"I am ready to send my child to a childcare facility, will you convince my husband?"
Respondent from Karnataka

For both NE and ENAC women the non access to childcare was linked to patriarchal hierarchy in division of unpaid care work and familiarized, gendered nature of childcare.

Awareness on crèches was also found to be low among women. **Almost 50% of women (ENAC and NE) were not even aware of the existence of crèche facilities. Among the ENAC women 62.9% were not aware of crèches.** The findings indicate that lack of awareness about childcare services is leading to poor demand for creches from the communities.

The 340 ENAC women depended on the arrangements mentioned in Figure 3.

As observed from the figure above the care arrangements were largely informal and dependent on families. **A high percentage (59%) reported that they were forced to adopting dangerous and compromised choices for childcare as the children were either left alone or carried to the worksites or left with a younger sibling at home or left in the care of a neighbor or a friend. The compromise on quality of childcare adversely impacted women's productivity and mental wellbeing.**

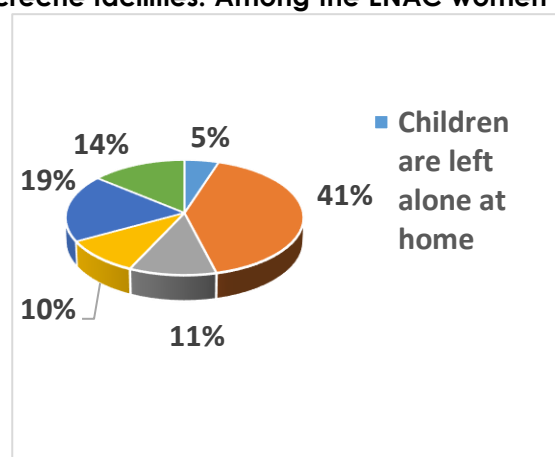


Figure 3: Care arrangements of ENAC (N=340) women (%)

Policy Recommendation

1. Universal full-day quality childcare by exploring diverse models to enhance economic and mental wellbeing of women with young children

The study clearly establishes that having access to a crèche has enabled women to join paid work and non access has restrained women's paid work participation. Therefore, it is important that state provides and regulates childcare provisions to realize universal full-day quality childcare. It will enhance economic and mental well-being of women from marginalized sections of the country.

The National Crèches Scheme (NCS) is already poorly funded, and provisions have declined over the years. The number of crèches and number of children covered have experienced a steep fall. Covid-19 pandemic has further dealt a big blow shutting down these essential services at a time when they are needed the most. There is an urgent need to increase Government budgets, with separate allocations for full-day crèche facilities with trained staff and infrastructure. Anganwadi centres (AWC) can be upgraded to AWC-cum-crèches by adding the care component and bolstering human and financial

Multiple models operated by different stakeholders like state, market, employers and communities may be explored to cater to this situation. The study shows that most women are accessing NGO run crèche facilities. There are also examples of other models like employer-run crèches and community crèches, in addition to privately run crèches. The state can play the roles of both regulator and provider. Further, in the backdrop of the gradual breakdown of traditional family arrangements of childcare, a community-based approach to the provision of child-care services can be looked into.

2. Awareness-building efforts on institutional childcare facilities to create and sustain demand for quality childcare services

There is a lack of awareness regarding crèche facilities among women in rural as well as in urban areas. Lack of awareness combined with cultural norms, which put the onus of childcare solely on mothers, makes it difficult for women from disadvantaged communities to demand childcare facilities. Large-scale information and public awareness programs undertaken by the government for better uptake, and localized campaigns initiated by civil society are needed to create awareness and agency of women to demand for quality institutional childcare facilities as a public good.

3. Develop a national strategy on care economy

The gender-based division of labor in the home and in society poses several constraints and serious disadvantages to women - for earning income, skill development, participating in public and democratic life and having rest and leisure time. Therefore, addressing care work must be a key policy priority to support women's economic empowerment. Time-use surveys can help to recognize the uneven distribution of care work of women in families. Similarly, budgetary allocations by the state can reduce and redistribute the unpaid care work by redistributing care work from the families to the state, market and communities, thereby enabling them to play a greater role in the society.

ⁱ Working or Not: What determines women's Labour force participation in India? IWWAGE, LEAD at Krea University, April -2021

ⁱⁱ Female Labour Force Participation in India and Beyond, Ruchika Chaudhary and Sher Verik, , ILO Asia –Pacific Working Paper Series. ILO Publication October 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ The Motherhood Penalty and Female Employment in Urban India, Maitreyi B. Das and Ieva Zmbyte, March 2017. Accessed from Research gate in September. Link :

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347518324_The_Motherhood_Penalty_and_Female_Employment_in_Urban_India

^{iv} World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2018, ILO Publication, 2018

^v Association for Stimulating Know How. (2011). "SEWA Childcare: Impact Assessment Report for Year 2011". Gurgaon: India