

**F-09 A study on infant day care programmes adopted by working mothers in a suburban area\***

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With the increasing trend in women joining the labour force and the occupational structure shifting from the traditional informal sector to the modern sector, a pronounced need for alternative infant and child-care arrangements is noted. In this study an attempt is made to examine the infant day care programmes adopted by a suburban community of Colombo. The study was conducted with a sample of 33 working mothers. Mothers' perceptions of the adopted day care programmes, reasons for adopting these programmes, the type of day care facility desired and the nature of care-giver behaviour were studied. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using in-depth interview and open continuous observations.

Analysis of data revealed that the majority of the working mothers left their infants to the informal care of the household. No formal or informal group infant care programmes were available. Only one group care arrangement which is a pre-school cum day care centre was found in the locality. Majority of mothers tried to find a care giver from the family circle and having no other alternative was the major reason given by working mothers who left the infants with care givers who are non-relatives. Mothers desired the establishment of formal day care centres with trained staff as an alternative day care arrangement. Observation of care giving situations revealed that majority of care givers were providing satisfactory care, focusing on basic care giving routines. But the emphasis on stimulative play and verbal interaction was found to be considerably low.

It was evident that the combined importance of early stimulation and quality of care has not thus far aroused an adequate interest in the Sri Lankan society. Although several proposals have been made for establishment of early childhood care and education, they are yet to materialise.

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