



A study to assess behavioral problems among preschoolers as reported by their caregivers with a view to prepare information booklet from selected Anganwadi Centres of Thane.

Ms. Rani Vibhishan Gupta¹, Mrs. Sheetal Kothare²

¹2nd Year M. Sc. Nursing, Department of Child Health Nursing, S.N.D.T Women's University, LT College of Nursing, Mumbai- 400020

²Assistant Professor, Department of Child Health Nursing, S.N.D.T Women's University, LT College of Nursing, Mumbai- 400020

Abstract

Background: Children are a Nation's most valuable asset, representing hope for the future. The early years of a child's life particularly up to the age of six are crucial for their development. This period is characterized by rapid growth in various aspects, including physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and language development. 90% of brain development has already taken place by the child is six years age making the early years a particularly crucial stage for intervention. **Objectives:** 1. To identify behavioural problems among preschool children at selected Anganwadi centres as reported by the caregivers. 2. To determine the association between behavioural problems of preschool children and selected demographic variables. 3. To develop the information booklet based on reported behavioural problems among preschool children. **Hypothesis:** H1: There will be a significant association between the behavioural problems of preschool children and selected demographic variables. **Methodology:** The research design consisted of Survey design. The population selected for the study was 100 caregivers of preschool children in selected Anganwadi centres of Thane. 100 caregivers of preschool children and were selected by using non-probability convenience sampling technique. The development of the tool involved steps of test construction i.e. preparing the blue print, selection of items, content validation and establishment of reliability. The content validity of the questionnaire was done and modifications were done according to the suggestions given by the experts. Pre-testing and reliability of the tools were done. The reliability coefficient of the cramp score was found to be 0.893. The tool was found to be reliable. **Results:** The study assessed children's emotional and behavioural problems using the SDQ scale. The most common abnormal domains were peer problems (30%), conduct problems (29%), hyperactivity (24%), prosocial behaviour (19%), and emotional problems (7%). Abnormal total difficulties and impact scores were found in 21% and 27% of children,

respectively. Gender was the only significant variable, with males showing higher scores than females ($\chi^2(2) = 6.287, p = 0.043$), indicating that gender influences behavioural and emotional problems. Family income was also significantly associated with total difficulties scores ($\chi^2(4) = 10.824, p = 0.029$), with higher scores observed in low- and high-income groups compared to the moderate-income group. **Conclusion and Recommendations:** The study explored into various types of emotional and behavioural problems among preschool children. The study found that male children and those from families with low or high income had higher levels of behavioural and emotional problems.

Keywords: Assess, Behavioral problems, Preschoolers, Caregivers, Information booklet Introduction

As the child grows into early childhood, his world begins to open up. He will become more independent and pay extra attention to adults and children outside the family. He will want to explore his surroundings and will have lots of questions to ask. His interactions with family and those around him will help to shape his personality and individual ways of thinking and moving.

Children thrive when they feel safe, loved and nurtured. Providing a child with love and affection is a pre-requisite for the healthy development of their brain, their self-confidence, capacity to thrive and even their ability to form relationships as they go through life. When parents notice their child's needs and lovingly respond to them, this helps their child to feel at ease. Feeling safe, seen, soothed and secure increases neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to change and adapt. When a child's world at home is full of love, they are better prepared to deal with the challenges of the larger world. A positive early bond lays the ground for children to grow up to become happy, independent adults. Loving, secure relationships help build resilience, and our ability to cope with challenges and recover from setbacks.

One in every 8 people worldwide has a mental disorder. In 2019, 301 million people were living with anxiety disorder, including 58 million children and adolescents. Additionally, 280 million people were living with depression, including 23 million children and adolescents. Eating disorders affect almost 14 million people, including around 3 million children and adolescents. Lastly, conduct-dissocial disorder affected about 40 million people, including children and adolescents.

Behavioural problems in children should not be mistaken for mental disorders but rather understood as deviation from expected social behaviour. These problems can manifest as signs and symptoms that indicate potential risks to a child's development. Preschool behaviour problems can be attributed to a combination of biological and environmental factors. These factors include individual differences in child characteristics such as activity level, sociability and attention, as well as the quality of the caregiving environment. Various causes contribute to behavioural issues in preschool children, including parental negligence, poor supervision, lack of attention, family conflict, and maladjustment. Specific examples include overly strict parenting, rejection, sibling rivalry, unconscious anger or defiance in children, aggression and neurotic attitudes displayed by mothers.

Behavioural problems in children occur in the developmental period. They may manifest behaviours that deviate from normal behaviour expected from a child of the same age. These problems are related to inappropriate behaviours and feelings, unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships, school learning problems, unhappiness, physical symptoms or fears related to school or personal problems. They range from mild, short-lived periods of unacceptable behaviour to more severe problems such as hyperactivity, conduct

disorders and refusal to go to school. Some behaviours are persistent and have a negative impact on the growth of the child, e.g. poor concentration or hyperactivity causes a decline in academic performance. If that behaviour inhibits his ability to work in the classroom or interact with peers, or if he is constantly talking and disrupting other classmates and not focusing on his work, then the child having an issue.

The most common health problems in preschool children are emotional and behavioural problems. Many preschool children are not diagnosed and do not receive the required support. These children have a high risk of developing serious psychiatric disorders, poor social skills and educational difficulties in future if they are not diagnosed and treated early on. The quality of the environment where children and adolescents grow up shapes their well-being and development. Early negative experiences in homes, schools, or spaces, such as exposure to violence, the mental illness of a parent or other caregiver, bullying and poverty, increase the risk of mental illness.

Mental health conditions, such as childhood epilepsy, developmental disabilities, depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders, are major causes of illness and disability among young people. Worldwide, 10% of children and adolescents experience a mental disorder, but the majority of them do not seek help or receive care. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds. The consequences of not addressing mental health and psychosocial development for children and adolescents extend to adulthood and limit opportunities for leading fulfilling lives.

Some misbehaviour is a normal part of childhood development. Often, children test rules and boundaries by misbehaving to discover what caregivers will and will not allow. In some, cases, behavioural problems are symptoms of an underlying problem. Normally children often become irritable and moody when they are tired or hungry. Another stressor that can cause behaviour problems at home or issues in a child's childcare environment. Children who are exposed to tension and fighting between their parents or between parents and an older child often feel confused and frightened, sometimes leading to misbehaviour. Child development is strongly influenced by their physical, emotional and social environment. Parents are integral in shaping this environment. Lack of positive attention from parents paired with inconsistent and inappropriate discipline is predictive of anti-social behaviour, conduct disorder and criminality in later life.

The quality of the child-parent relationship is a critical factor. When parental supervision is poor, discipline is erratic and harsh, disharmony exists between parents, the child is rejected, and parental involvement in the child's activities is low, behavioural and emotional problems are more likely to arise. In families where domestic violence, poor parenting skills, or substance abuse are prevalent, negative consequences can arise, including compromised parental functioning, increased conflict between parents, harsh disciplinary practices, and reduced support and involvement in parenting. The early onset of disruptive behaviours and antisocial tendencies is another factor to consider.

Moreover, gender differences are apparent, with boys being more susceptible to various behavioural and emotional disorders, whereas girls are more prone to depression. It should be noted that although boys have a higher prevalence of childhood ADHD and ASD, pathological demand avoidance (PDA) affects both boys and girls equally.

Material and Methods

Research approach: Qualitative Research Approach.

Research design: Survey design.

Research setting: Selected Anganwadi Centres of Thane.

Population: Preschoolers as reported by their caregivers.

Sample: Preschoolers as reported by their caregivers from selected Anganwadi Centres of Thane.

Sampling technique : Non-probability convenience sampling technique.

Sample size: 100 Preschoolers as reported by their caregivers.

Criteria for selection of the sample

Inclusion Criteria-

- Children aged between 4-6 years.
- Children who were attending Anganwadi centres for at least 6 months.
- Caregivers of children who are willing to participate in this study.

Exclusion Criteria-

- Preschoolers who have any physical or mental disabilities.
- Preschoolers who have any chronic illness.
- ✓ Caregivers who are not willing to participate in this study.

Development of the tool

The tool was divided into three sections:

Section I

Deals with the demographic data of preschool children

Section II

Deals with the demographic data of caregivers.

Section III

Consisted of a standardized tool Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (4-16 years) were used for assessing the emotional and behavioural problems of preschool children as reported by the caregiver. The Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) is a globally recognized tool for assessing the mental health status of children and young people.

Results and Discussion

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF SDQ SCORE OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Sr. No	Characteristics	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	
1	EMOTIONAL PROBLEM SCALE	Normal	0-3	77	77.0
		Borderline	4	16	16.0
		Abnormal	5-10	7	7.0
2	CONDUCT PROBLEM SCALE	Normal	0-2	55	55.0
		Borderline	3	16	16.0
		Abnormal	4-10	29	29.0
3	HYPERACTIVITY SCALE	Normal	0-5	64	64.0
		Borderline	6	12	12.0
		Abnormal	7-10	24	24.0
4	PEER PROBLEM SCALE	Normal	0-2	44	44.0
		Borderline	3	26	26.0
		Abnormal	4-10	30	30.0
5	PROSOCIAL SCALE	Normal	6-10	59	59.0
		Borderline	5	22	22.0
		Abnormal	0-4	19	19.0
6	TOTAL DIFFICULTIES SCORE	Normal	0-13	62	62.0
		Borderline	14-16	17	17.0
		Abnormal	17-40	21	21.0
7	IMPACT SCORE	Normal	0	66	66.0
		Borderline	1	7	7.0
		Abnormal	2-10	27	27.0

- Emotional problem scale:** This scale measures the emotional problems of preschool children. The above table shows that most of the children 77% have a normal score (0-3) which means they did not have many emotional symptoms such as being worried, unhappy, nervous, or scared. A smaller proportion of children 16% have a borderline score (4), and 7% have an abnormal score (5-10), which means they had more emotional symptoms.
- Conduct problem scale:** This scale measures the conduct problems of preschool children. The above table shows that about half of children 55% have a normal score (0-2), which means they did not have many conduct problems such as being disobedient, lying, stealing, or fighting. A smaller proportion of children 16% have a borderline score (3), and a larger proportion of children 29% have an abnormal score (4-10), which means they had more conduct problems.
- Hyperactivity scale:** This scale measures the hyperactivity of preschool children. The above table shows that more than half of children 64% have a normal score (0-5) which means they did not have many hyperactivity or inattention problems such as being restless, fidgety, easily distracted, or impulsive. A smaller proportion of children 12% have a borderline score (6), and a larger proportion

of children 24% have an abnormal score (7-10) which means they had more hyperactivity or inattention problems.

4. **Peer problem scale:** This scale measures the peer problems of preschool children. The above table shows that less than half of children 44% have a normal score (0-2) which means they did not have many peer relationship problems such as being unpopular, bullied, or lonely. A larger proportion of children 26% have a borderline score (3), and a similar proportion of children 30% have an abnormal score (4-10).
5. **Prosocial scale:** This scale measures the prosocial behaviour of preschool children. The above table shows that more than half of the children 59% have a normal score (6-10) which means they had good prosocial behaviour such as being helpful, kind, cooperative, or sharing, A smaller proportion of children 22% have a borderline score (5), and a similar proportion of children 19% have an abnormal score (0-4) which means they had poor prosocial behaviour.
6. **Total difficulties score:** This score measures the overall difficulties faced by preschool children. The above table shows that more than half of the children 62% have a normal score (0-13) which means that they did not have many overall difficulties in their psychological adjustment. A smaller proportion of children 17% have a borderline score (14-16), and a similar proportion of children 21% have an abnormal score (17-40) which means they had more overall difficulties in their psychological adjustment.
7. **Impact score:** This score measures the impact of difficulties on preschool children. The above table shows that two-thirds of the children 66% have a normal score (0) which means they did not have any or much impact of their difficulties on their daily functioning and well-being. A very small proportion of children 7% have a borderline score (1), and a larger proportion of children 27% have an abnormal score (2-10), which means they had a lot of impact of their difficulties on their daily functioning and well-being.

Conclusion

Among 100 preschool children, most were 4–5 years old and male, with no significant medical or birth complications. Most caregivers were mothers, married, unemployed, and from nuclear families. Although most children had normal SDQ scores, higher abnormalities were seen in peer problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, total difficulties, and impact scores. Gender showed a significant association with total difficulty scores, with males scoring higher ($p = 0.043$). Family income was also significant ($p = 0.029$), with higher scores in low- and high-income groups. The findings highlight the need for early identification and parental awareness regarding behavioural and emotional problems in preschool children.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made for further study:

- A similar study can be conducted on a larger sample for further generalization of the results.
- Conduct qualitative studies to explore the experiences and perspectives of parents, teachers and healthcare providers regarding preschool children's behavioural problems.

- Investigate the influence of early childhood experiences, such as trauma or adverse childhood events, on the development of behavioural problems in preschool children.
- Explore the impact of technology use, screen time, and social media on preschool children's behaviour.

Declarations

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Informed Consent: The authors have obtained student consent and were asked to sign the consent form. All data collected were kept strictly confidential.

Ethical Approval: The proposal for the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the S.N.D.T Women's University, LT College of Nursing, Mumbai- 400020.

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