

A Comparative Study to assess the Behavioral Problems of Preschool Children (2 years to 6 years) among Working and Non-Working Mothers

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Abstract: Preschool age is an important period of growth and development in which children learn social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills. However, this stage may also be associated with frustration, emotional instability, temper tantrums, hyperactivity, aggression, dependency, and other behavioral problems. The present study was conducted to assess and compare the behavioral problems of preschool children aged 2–6 years among working and non-working mothers. A non-experimental descriptive comparative research design was adopted. The study was conducted in selected preschools, namely Lake City Primary School, Mega Mind Public School, and Central Public School, located in Anand Nagar, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The sample consisted of 60 mothers, including 30 working mothers and 30 non-working mothers of preschool children. Data were collected using a demographic perform and Behavioral Problems Assessment Rating Scale. The findings revealed that mild behavioral problems were observed in 41.3% of children of working mothers and 82% of children of non-working mothers. Moderate behavioral problems were reported among 63.7% of children of working mothers and 16.3% of children of non-working mothers. A significant difference was observed in the level of behavioral problems among preschool children of working and non-working mothers. Factors such as the child's age and gender were also found to be associated with behavioral problems. The study concluded that preschool children of working mothers had more behavioral problems than those of non-working mothers. Health care professionals, especially nurses, can play an important role in reducing behavioral problems through parental guidance, early identification, counseling, and health education.

Keywords: Behavioral problems, preschool children, working mothers, non-working mothers, child behavior, preschool development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, mothers have taken full-time responsibility for raising their children and fulfilling their basic physical, emotional, social, and

psychological needs of their children. Children are considered one of the most valuable assets of a nation because their healthy growth and development contribute to society's future strength. The preschool years, especially from 2 to 6 years of age, are crucial

for learning, emotional development, social adjustment, language acquisition, and personality formation (Vatou et al., 2026).

During the preschool period, children begin to explore their surroundings, interact with family members and peers, develop independence, and learn socially acceptable behavior. At the same time, this stage can also be challenging because children may become easily frustrated when their needs are not met or when they are unable to express themselves properly. Behavioral problems, such as temper tantrums, aggression, excessive crying, stubbornness, hyperactivity, fearfulness, poor concentration, dependency, sleep disturbance, and poor social interaction, may occur during this phase (Powell et al., 2006).

Many children experience behavioral problems at some point during their development. While some behavioral changes may be temporary and part of normal development, persistent and severe behavioral problems may affect a child's emotional health, academic readiness, peer relationships, and family adjustment. Therefore, it is important for mothers to spend quality time with their children, carefully observe their behavior, and identify behavioral changes at an early stage (Kumar et al., 2015).

In the present social context, many mothers are engaged in employment outside the home because of educational, economic, professional, and social reasons. Working mothers may face challenges in balancing professional responsibilities and childcare. In contrast, non-working mothers may spend more time with their children but may also experience stress due to continuous caregiving responsibilities. Hence, the behavior of preschool children may be influenced not only by whether the mother is working or not but also by the quality of care, family support, parenting style, child's age, gender, and home environment (Sattler et al., 2023).

II. BACKGROUND

Children are one of the most valuable resources of a nation, and their healthy growth and development are essential for the future progress of society. The preschool period, particularly between 2 and 6 years of age, is a critical stage in a child's life. During this period, children develop rapidly in physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and language areas. They

begin to explore the environment, interact with others, express their needs, develop independence, and learn acceptable social behavior (Callahan & Osofsky, 2015). Simultaneously, this stage is sensitive because children may not have complete control over their emotions and behavior. Consequently, they may exhibit behavioral problems such as temper tantrums, aggression, stubbornness, excessive crying, hyperactivity, fearfulness, dependency, poor attention, sleep disturbances, eating problems, and difficulty in adjusting with peers (Hinshaw, 2010).

Behavioral problems in preschool children are common; however, they should not be ignored. Some behavioral changes may be temporary and may occur as part of normal development. However, when such problems become frequent, intense, and persistent, they may affect a child's emotional stability, school readiness, social relationships, family adjustment, and future personality development. Preschool behavioral problems are now considered important warning signs because they may continue into later childhood if not identified and managed early. Therefore, early screening and assessment of behavioral problems are necessary to detect developmental and emotional difficulties among preschool children (Al-Mossawy et al., 2023).

Mothers play a major role in the early development of children. Traditionally, mothers have taken full-time responsibility for child-rearing, providing care, affection, nutrition, discipline, and emotional support. The quality of mother-child interaction has a strong influence on children's behavior and personality. Mothers are usually the first people to observe changes in children's mood, habits, communication, and social adjustment. Therefore, their role is important in identifying early behavioral problems (Preiß et al., 2024).

In the current social situation, many mothers are employed because of educational advancement, financial needs, professional growth, and changing family demands. Working mothers must manage both occupational responsibilities and family duties. Owing to work pressure, time limitations, and fatigue, they may not always be able to spend sufficient quality time with their children (Tripathi et al., 2016). In some families, children of working mothers are cared for by grandparents, daycare centers, servants, or other caregivers. This may influence a child's emotional

security and behavior, especially when caregiving is inconsistent (Rothenberg & Bornstein, 2023).

In contrast, non-working mothers usually spend more time with their children and may provide continuous supervision and emotional support. However, children of non-working mothers may also develop behavioral problems due to overprotection, excessive pampering, lack of peer interaction, inconsistent discipline, or family stress. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that children of non-working mothers are always free from behavioral problems (Menaghan & Parcel, 2013).

A comparative study between preschool children of working and non-working mothers is important to understand whether maternal employment status is related to behavioral problems. Such a study helps identify the level and type of behavioral problems in both groups. It also helps health care professionals, especially nurses, teachers, and counselors, to provide guidance, parental education, and early intervention. Early identification and proper counseling can help reduce behavioral problems and promote healthy emotional and social development among preschool children (Genç & Ayna, 2025).

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Preschool behavioral problems are increasingly recognized as important indicators of difficulties that may persist into later childhood. These problems may also reflect family dysfunction, emotional insecurity, ineffective parenting patterns, or a lack of proper developmental stimulation. If behavioral problems are not identified and managed early, they may affect a child's school readiness, learning capacity, emotional stability, and social relationships (Al-Mossawy et al., 2023).

Screening is necessary to detect developmental and behavioral problems in preschool children. Early identification helps parents, teachers, nurses, and other healthcare professionals provide timely guidance and remedial measures. According to the World Health Report 2001, 15% of children in India have serious emotional disturbance. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, the overall prevalence of mental and behavioral disorders among Indian children is 12.5%. Studies conducted in rural and urban areas of different parts of India suggest that the prevalence of behavioral disorders ranges from 1.6% to 41.3% (Biswas et al., 2022).

These figures indicate that behavioral problems among children are a significant concern. As mothers play a major role in child-rearing, it is essential to assess whether the employment status of mothers is related to the behavioral problems of preschool children. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify behavioral problems among preschool children of working and non-working mothers so that remedial measures can be adopted at the earliest to reduce the incidence and severity of such problems.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"A comparative study to assess the behavioral problems of preschool children aged 2 years to 6 years among working and non-working mothers in selected preschools of Bhopal city, Madhya Pradesh."

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the behavioral problems among preschoolers of working mothers in selected playgroups.
- To assess the behavioral problems among preschoolers of non-working mothers in selected playgroups.
- To compare the behavioral problems among preschoolers of working and non-working mothers in selected playgroups.
- To find out the association between behavioral problems among children of working and non-working mothers with selected demographic variables.

VI. HYPOTHESES

H0: There will be no significant difference in the level of behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers.

H1: There will be a significant difference in the level of behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers.

H2: There will be a significant association between the level of behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers and selected demographic variables.

VII. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Behavioral Problems: Behavioral problems refer to undesirable or maladaptive behaviors observed among

preschool children, such as aggression, hyperactivity, temper tantrums, stubbornness, excessive crying, fearfulness, dependency, poor concentration, sleep problems, and poor social adjustment, as assessed by the Behavioral Problems Assessment Rating Scale.

Preschool Children: Preschool children refer to children aged between 2 years and 6 years who are attending selected preschools or playgroups.

Working Mothers: Working mothers refer to mothers who are engaged in paid employment outside the home or in any regular income-generating occupation.

Non-Working Mothers: Non-working mothers refer to mothers who are not engaged in paid employment and are mainly involved in household and childcare responsibilities.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was used for the study.

Research Design

A non-experimental descriptive comparative research design was adopted to compare the behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in selected preschools of Anand Nagar, Bhopal city, Madhya Pradesh. The selected schools were:

- Lake City Primary School
- Mega Mind Public School
- Central Public School

Population

The population consisted of mothers of preschool children aged 2–6 years.

Sample

The sample consisted of working and non-working mothers of preschool children.

Sample Size

The total sample size was 60 mothers, divided into two groups:

Table 1: Group and their Sample Size

Group	Sample Size
Working mothers	30
Non-working mothers	30
Total	60

Sampling Technique

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample.

Inclusion Criteria

Mothers who:

- Had preschool children aged 2–6 years.
- Were willing to participate in the study.
- Were available during the period of data collection.
- Could understand and respond to the questions.
- Belonged either to the working or non-working category.

Exclusion Criteria

Mothers whose children:

- Had diagnosed neurological disorders.
- Had severe developmental delay.
- Were seriously ill at the time of data collection.
- Were under psychiatric treatment.

Tool for Data Collection

The data collection tool consisted of two parts.

Part I: Demographic Performa

The demographic Performa included variables such as:

Table 2: Demographic Performa

Demographic Variable	Categories
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Age of child	2–3 years, 3–4 years, 4–5 years, 5–6 years
Gender of child	Male, Female
Birth order	First, Second, Third or above
Type of family	Nuclear, Joint, Extended
Mother’s education	Primary, Secondary, Graduate, Postgraduate
Mother’s occupation	Working, non-working
Family income	Low, Middle, High
Number of children	One, Two, More than two
Childcare support	Mother, Grandparents, Daycare, Other caregiver

Part II: Behavioral Problems Assessment Rating Scale

The Behavioral Problems Assessment Rating Scale was administered to both working and non-working mothers. The scale was used to assess the level of behavioral problems among preschool children. It included areas such as:

Table 3: Area of Behavioral Problem and their Examples

Area of Behavioral Problem	Examples
Aggressive behavior	Hitting, biting, shouting, fighting
Hyperactivity	Restlessness, excessive movement, inability to sit quietly
Emotional problems	Crying, fearfulness, mood changes
Social problems	Poor peer interaction, withdrawal, refusal to share
Attention problems	Poor concentration, distractibility
Dependency	Clinging behavior, separation difficulty
Sleep and eating problems	Poor sleep, refusal to eat, irregular routine

The behavioral problems were classified into different levels such as mild, moderate, and severe based on the obtained score.

IX. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Formal permission was obtained from the authorities of selected preschools. The purpose of the study was explained to the mothers, and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Confidentiality of the information was maintained throughout the study.

The demographic performa and Behavioral Problems Assessment Rating Scale were administered to both working and non-working mothers. The mothers were asked to provide responses based on the usual behavior of their preschool children. The collected data were organized, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

X. PLAN FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 4: Objectives for Data Analysis

Objective	Statistical Method
To describe demographic variables	Frequency and percentage
To assess behavioral problems	Mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage
To compare behavioral problems between groups	Independent t-test
To find association with demographic variables	Chi-square test
Level of significance	$p < 0.05$

XI. RESULTS

The results of the study revealed that preschool children of working and non-working mothers had different levels of behavioral problems.

Table 5: Distribution of Behavioral Problems among Preschool Children of Working and Non-Working Mothers

Level of Behavioral Problems	Children of Working Mothers	Children of Non-Working Mothers
Mild behavioral problems	41.3%	82%

Moderate behavioral problems	63.7%	16.3%
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The findings showed that mild behavioral problems were more common among children of non-working mothers, whereas moderate behavioral problems were more common among children of working mothers. A significant difference was observed in the level of behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers. The study also found that selected demographic variables such as the child's age and gender were associated with behavioral problems.

XII. DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to assess and compare the behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers. The findings revealed that preschool children of working mothers had a higher level of moderate behavioral problems compared to children of non-working mothers. This may be due to reduced direct supervision time, work-related stress of mothers, dependency on alternative caregivers, and limited quality interaction between mother and child.

Children of working mothers may show behavioral issues such as irritability, attention-seeking behavior, aggression, hyperactivity, dependency, and difficulty in emotional regulation. However, it is important to understand that maternal employment alone cannot be considered the only cause of behavioral problems. The quality of parenting, emotional bonding, family support, caregiver quality, discipline pattern, and home environment also influence the child's behavior.

The study also showed that children of non-working mothers had a higher percentage of mild behavioral problems. This indicates that behavioral problems are also present among children of non-working mothers, although the severity may be lower. In some cases, overprotection, excessive pampering, lack of peer interaction, or inconsistent discipline may contribute to mild behavioral issues.

The association of behavioral problems with the child's age and gender suggests that developmental stage and sex-related behavioral patterns may influence the occurrence of behavioral problems. Younger preschool children may show tantrums and

dependency, whereas older preschoolers may show aggression, stubbornness, or social adjustment issues. Similarly, boys and girls may differ in expression of behavioral problems due to biological, social, and parental expectations.

The findings highlight the importance of early identification and parental counseling. Mothers should be educated regarding quality time, positive discipline, emotional support, healthy routines, and early management of behavioral changes.

XIII. NURSING IMPLICATIONS

Nursing Practice

Nurses can help in early identification of behavioral problems among preschool children during school health programs, pediatric outpatient visits, immunization clinics, and community health services. They can guide mothers regarding positive parenting, emotional care, discipline, nutrition, sleep habits, and reduction of behavioral risk factors.

Nursing Education

Nursing students should be trained to assess behavioral problems in children and provide counseling to parents. Child psychology, preschool behavior, and parental guidance should be emphasized in nursing education.

Nursing Administration

Nurse administrators can organize awareness programs, parent education sessions, school health camps, and counseling services in preschools and community areas.

Nursing Research

Further research can be conducted on larger samples to study the influence of parenting style, family environment, screen time, daycare quality, and father involvement on preschool behavioral problems.

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A similar study can be conducted with a larger sample size.
- A comparative study can be conducted between urban and rural preschool children.

- A study can be conducted to assess the effect of parenting style on behavioral problems.
- An interventional study can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of parental counseling.
- A study can be conducted to assess the relationship between screen time and behavioral problems.
- A longitudinal study can be conducted to observe behavioral changes in preschool children over time.
- Health education programs may be organized for mothers regarding early identification and management of behavioral problems.

XV. LIMITATIONS

- The study was limited to selected preschools of Anand Nagar, Bhopal.
- The sample size was limited to 60 mothers.
- The study relied on mothers' responses, which may involve personal bias.
- The study did not control all external factors such as parenting style, family stress, screen time, and caregiver quality.
- The findings cannot be generalized to all preschool children.

XVI. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that preschool children of working mothers had more behavioral problems than those of non-working mothers. Mild behavioral problems were more common among children of non-working mothers, whereas moderate behavioral problems were more common among children of working mothers. A significant difference was found between the behavioral problems of preschool children among working and non-working mothers. The study also revealed that factors such as the child's age and gender were associated with behavioral issues.

Behavioral problems during the preschool period should not be ignored, as they may affect the child's future emotional, social, and academic development. Health care professionals, especially nurses, can play a major role in reducing behavioral problems by providing guidance, counseling, health education, and early referral services to both children and their mothers.

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