

A Study on the Effects of Maternal Age at Birth on Child Development

Sadaf Rana Khan

PhD Scholar, Matru Sewa Sangh Institute of Social Work, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

Abstract: *Maternal age in India has shown a steady change if it is compared from previous generations. Today, mother's age at birth has shifted from 22 which was the average in 1960s to 30 in the present scenario. This study examines the impact of shifting maternal age at first childbirth on child behavioral outcomes in India. The analysis is based on a review of various studies, with a focus on the implications for parenting practices and child development. The findings highlight the need for interventions to support healthy parenting practices, particularly among younger mothers. The paper may help scholars, institutions of concerned field, students to understand the problem and measures to intervention. It will also help parents to adopt healthy parenting practices.*

Keywords: Maternal age, child rearing, parenting practices, behavioral outcomes.

1. Introduction

In today's time where country like India is developing so rapidly, women are also growing fast with this developing nation and has also becoming the contributors in nation building. Since few couple of years, there is shift in age of mothers at the time of birth in order to balance family and job, financial responsibilities and standard of livings. Studies revealed that 50% of Indian women choose to remain childless till 30 years of age. Families also prefer two children in today's time whereas it was very normal to have four or five children in a family during 1940s. Due to a lot of stress a women goes through in day to day life with added responsibilities of job have increased hormonal disorders among women which resulted in decreased fertility (Desk, 2022). Women plays a crucial role in the rearing of an infant and the practices adopted by parents reflects in the behavior of a child when he or reaches the age of 3 - 6 years. Literature released by United Nations on child development stated that children of young mothers were found to have poor academic performance when compared with older mothers. But few of the investigators have shown different results when socioeconomic status was kept controlled (Korenman & Hillemeier, 2015).

Many studies done in the past have shown that mother's age has an impact on child's emotional and behavioral development because of two major causes. The very first reason is females who become mother at an early age have their own physical and mental issues such as hormonal changes, cognitive changes and generally have low socioeconomic background with low levels of education. Secondly early marriage stops women from doing various things such as education, unable to become self - dependent which definitely effects the development of a child (López Turley, 2003). Mother's age at birth is very important to study as it helps in understanding the extent of knowledge mothers have pertaining to development of a new life. However there is a need to have research on various factors that affects mother's knowledge such as culture, family support systems, home environment to analyze the mother - child relationship and child development (Ertem et al., 2007).

Females who have become mothers at an early age are likely to suffer depression due to various reasons such as low levels of maturity results in understanding issues with other family members, unable to cope up with stressful situations, unaware of upbringing the new born and many more. Such conditions give rise to depression among mothers at an very early ages of their lives which impacted children in many ways. Children of such depressed mother or parents generally have behavioral issues when compared with normal families. Children becomes angry very frequently, have high levels of anxiety and many a times found hyper active if parents have depression issues (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Given these possibilities and the historical literature on maternal age and child development, it would seem beneficial for researchers or practitioners developing interventions to improve child development to take into account the possibility that older teenagers from disadvantaged groups may not be considered "adolescents," or that social parenting may be a shared activity (Korenman & Hillemeier, 2015).

2. Maternal Age and Child Knowledge

Lack of mother's knowledge is positively associated with the poor methods of parenting practices and mother's age is also responsible of having the degree of knowledge of child development. Children of adolescent parents had a much higher likelihood of experiencing early school dropout, unemployment, violent offence, and parenting, according to a 20 - year longitudinal study of these kids (Reich, 2005). Having the same view that mother's knowledge has been associated with age, culture, education and also child's gender. It was also analyzed that older the mother's age, better will be the chances of better parenting knowledge and practices. Study showed that children of adolescent or young mothers tend to suffer higher rates of child abuse than to older mothers (Tamis - LeMonda et al., 2002).

Research studies show that mothers who are more knowledgeable about child development are more likely to give their kids developmental stimulation, which leads to better developmental outcomes for the kids. One of the factors which determine the knowledge of mother about child development is age because if she gets married at a

very early age, there is more chances of her to have lack of access for education and maturity which is required to raise a child in a better way. Another factor such as culture, mother's mental stability, social support etc. also contributes toward gaining knowledge on child development. Many studies such as WHO on child attainment of developmental milestones concluded that countries like India, Ghana, Oman have difference in parent's knowledge on child developmental milestones due to cultural differences (Ertem et al., 2007).

Some of the studies also showed that younger or teenage mothers are less sensitive and responsive towards their children which have a negative impact on the children. Due to lack of knowledge and sense, these mothers often end up with strict physical punishments and abuse to the child. But few of the researchers denied any significant relationship between the maternal age and child development (Korenman & Hillemeier, 2015).

Maternal age is also associated with the undernourished children as well as mother. Teenagers who are pregnant may have dietary needs that conflict with those of the fetus since they are still growing and have higher nutritional needs than pregnant adults. This may also effect on the breastfeeding of younger mother than that of older mothers (Wemakor et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

(López Turley, 2003) Researched on relationship between maternal age and child development. He used data of 3 - 16 years children from 1986 to 1998 of the National Survey of Youth. The assessment measure used to understand children's cognitive ability and behavioral problems. But, this study concluded that children having such issues are not due to the maternal younger or older age but due to the family background. The study also suggested that the disadvantages to children of younger mother can be lower down with controlled family background.

Study on Maternal knowledge and child development conducted by (Reich, 2005) examined the knowledge of 203 young mothers through structured self made interview schedules. It was found that young mothers generally don't have any knowledge about the sleeping patterns of new born and other developmental abilities of 6months old baby. It was also concluded that young mothers generally overestimated the child's abilities.

Similar study on mother's age and knowledge and child development was done by (Ertem et al., 2007) where they used Caregiver Knowledge of Child Development Inventory (CKCDI) which include questions on when children began to show developmental skills and mother's intervention needed. Total 1200 mothers of children upto 3years of age were the respondents and selected through random population based sampling. It was concluded that majority of mothers have the conception that children began to show developmental signs at later age and majority of mothers do not have knowledge that children holistic development such as social smiling, responsiveness, fine motor skills etc. develops at early stages of child development.

(Korenman & Hillemeier, 2015) conducted a longitudinal study on 'young maternal age and child development'. They took a sample of men and women from 14 - 21 years of age at the time of 1979 in which child assessment tool prepared by National Longitudinal Survey by Youth was followed. Approximately 3000 women were interviewed again in 1990. It was concluded that children of teen mothers were found lower in performance than that of children of older mothers.

(Shute & Slee, 2015)) Conducted a longitudinal study on impact of mother's depression on child development. Age was one the variable for the study and it was observed that chances of mother's depression after delivery are high with younger mothers. The result of depression is not observed in child at early stage but it can be observed in child's behavior at later stage (after 3 years of age).

4. Results

Studies done on maternal age and child development have followed various methods with different assessment tools. Most of the studies examined the academic and behavioral outcomes of children upto 16 years of age and few studies also analyzed the developmental milestones of infants of younger mothers. From majority of studies except one (López Turley, 2003) , it can be concluded that maternal age is a contributing factor in the development of child and have impact on the behavior of a child. Studies pertaining to nutrition also contributed in the field of maternal age, such studies concluded that younger mothers are more prone to malnourishment and also to children's lack of nutrition.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals a significant impact of maternal age at first childbirth on child behavioral outcomes. The findings underscore the need for supportive interventions, particularly for younger mothers, to promote healthy parenting practices and optimal child development. Further research is needed to explore the effects on siblings and consider additional factors such as education and family control. In most of the studies age and socioeconomic factor were included but education and family control should also be included as factors. The present literature may help practitioners, social worker, families and related professionals in understanding the major factors of child development and it may also open the opportunity for researchers to investigate the area which need to be focused.

References

- [1] Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (1994). Maternal Depression and Child Development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35 (1), 73–122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01133.x>
- [2] Desk, L. (2022). *Majority of women are having children post 30 as late motherhood becomes the norm, study finds*. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/study-says-majority-women-having-children-post-30-later-motherhood-becomes-norm-7749751/>

- [3] Ertem, I. O., Atay, G., Dogan, D. G., Bayhan, A., Bingoler, B. E., Gok, C. G., Ozbas, S., Haznedaroglu, D., & Isikli, S. (2007). Mothers' knowledge of young child development in a developing country. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 33 (6), 728–737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2007.00751.x>
- [4] Korenman, S., & Hillemeier, M. M. (2015). *Does Young Maternal Age Adversely Affect?* 20 (3), 585–609.
- [5] López Turley, R. N. (2003). Are Children of Young Mothers Disadvantaged because of Their Mother's Age or Family Background? *Child Development*, 74 (2), 465–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.7402010>
- [6] Reich, S. (2005). What do mothers know? Maternal knowledge of child development. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 26 (2), 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20038>
- [7] Shute, R. H., & Slee, P. T. (2015). Child development: Theories and critical perspectives. In *Child Development: Theories and Critical Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315767987>
- [8] Tamis - LeMonda, C. S., Shannon, J., & Spellmann, M. (2002). Low - income adolescent mothers' knowledge about domains of child development. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 23 (2), 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.10006>
- [9] Wemakor, A., Garti, H., Azongo, T., Garti, H., & Atosona, A. (2018). Young maternal age is a risk factor for child undernutrition in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana. *BMC Research Notes*, 11 (1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-018-3980-7>