

Behavioural Problems among Preschool Children: A Comparative Study between Working and Non-Working Mothers

Priyanka Choudhari

Associate Professor, Baba Educational society, College of Nursing, Lucknow

Abstract: Behavioural problems in preschool children are emerging as a significant public health concern affecting child development, family dynamics, and future societal outcomes. The present study aimed to assess and compare behavioural problems among preschool children of working and non-working mothers. A comparative research design was adopted, and 80 mothers (40 working and 40 non-working) were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using a self-structured rating scale covering domains such as emotional, behavioural, sleep, speech, and adjustment problems. The findings revealed that behavioural problems were more prevalent among children of working mothers, with 90% showing moderate behavioural issues, compared to predominantly mild problems (95%) among children of non-working mothers. A statistically significant difference was observed between the two groups ($p < 0.0001$). The study concludes that maternal employment influences behavioural outcomes in preschool children, highlighting the need for early identification and parental guidance interventions.

Keywords: Behavioural problems, preschool children, working mothers, non-working mothers, child development

1. Introduction

Children represent the foundation of a nation's future, and their mental and behavioural development plays a crucial role in shaping society. Behaviour refers to an individual's response to internal and external stimuli and is influenced by biological, psychological, and environmental factors.

Preschool years (3–6 years) are critical for emotional and social development. During this period, children depend heavily on parental care, particularly mothers, for emotional security, social interaction, and behavioural regulation. Inadequate fulfilment of these needs may lead to behavioural problems such as aggression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and adjustment issues.

Behavioural problems may arise due to multiple risk factors including genetic predisposition, family conflicts, parenting styles, and environmental influences. Studies indicate that 10–20% of children globally experience behavioural problems, with higher prevalence reported in Indian settings.

With increasing urbanization and maternal employment, children are often exposed to reduced parental supervision and increased reliance on daycare or external caregiving. This shift may influence behavioural patterns and emotional well-being. Therefore, it is essential to assess and compare behavioural problems among children of working and non-working mothers.

2. Need for the Study

Preschool behavioural problems are early indicators of future psychological and social difficulties. If not addressed timely, they may lead to academic failure, antisocial behaviour, and mental health disorders in later life.

Studies suggest that children of working mothers may receive less individualized attention, which can impact behavioural

development. Conversely, non-working mothers may provide more direct supervision and emotional support.

Early identification and intervention can significantly improve coping skills and behavioural outcomes in children. Hence, this study was undertaken to assess and compare behavioural problems among preschool children of working and non-working mothers.

3. Objectives

- 1) To assess behavioural problems among preschool children of working and non-working mothers
- 2) To compare behavioural problems between the two groups
- 3) To determine the association between behavioural problems and selected socio-demographic variables

4. Methodology

- **Research Approach:** Comparative approach
- **Research Design:** Non-experimental comparative design
- **Setting:** Urban area of Bhilai (Chhattisgarh)
- **Population:** Mothers of preschool children
- **Sample Size:** 80 (40 working + 40 non-working mothers)
- **Sampling Technique:** Non-probability purposive sampling
- **Tool:** Self-structured rating scale
- **Data Analysis:** Descriptive and inferential statistics (mean, SD, t-test, chi-square)

5. Results

5.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of **80 mothers** participated in the study, comprising **40 working mothers and 40 non-working mothers**.

1) Age of Mothers

The majority of mothers in both groups belonged to the **20–25 years age group**:

- Working mothers: **55%**
- Non-working mothers: **52.5%**

Only a small proportion of mothers were above 30 years (10% working, 20% non-working), indicating a relatively young study population.

2) Age of Children

- Among working mothers, most children were **3 years old (37.5%)**
- Among non-working mothers, majority were **4 years old (55%)**

This shows slight variation in age distribution between groups.

3) Family Characteristics

a) Majority belonged to **joint families**:

- Working: **67.5%**
- Non-working: **65%**

b) Number of children:

- Working mothers mostly had **1 child (57.5%)**
- Non-working mothers mostly had **≥3 children (60%)**

This indicates higher family size among non-working mothers.

4) Educational Status of Mothers

a) Working mothers were mostly **higher secondary or above**

b) Non-working mothers had lower education levels:

- **25% illiterate**
- **32.5% primary education**

This shows a strong association between **education and employment status**.

5) Income and Living Area

- Working mothers had higher income levels (30% earning > ₹15,000)
- Non-working mothers mostly belonged to lower income group (52.5% < ₹5000)
- Majority of both groups lived in **urban areas (>75%)**

5.2 Assessment of Behavioural Problems (Area-wise Analysis)

Behavioural problems were assessed across multiple domains:

Domain	Working Mothers (Mean %)	Non-Working Mothers (Mean %)
Personality problems	20%	60%
Eating problems	20%	30%
Habit problems	41.40%	55.70%
Speech problems	38%	38%
Sleep problems	26.60%	40%
Educational difficulties	40%	53.30%
Adjustment problems	48.30%	51.60%
Emotional problems	31.10%	47.70%
Somatic problems	34%	48%

Interpretation

- Non-working mothers reported **higher mean percentages** in most behavioural domains
- However, severity classification (next section) shows a **different pattern**

5.3 Overall Level of Behavioural Problems

Working Mothers

- Mild: **10%**
- Moderate: **90%**
- Severe: **0%**

Non-Working Mothers

- Mild: **95%**
- Moderate: **5%**
- Severe: **0%**

Interpretation

- Children of **working mothers predominantly had moderate behavioural problems**
- Children of **non-working mothers mostly had mild problems**

This clearly indicates **higher severity among children of working mothers**.

5.4 Comparison of Behavioural Problem Scores

- t-value = 13.63
- $p < 0.0001$ (**Highly significant**)

Group	Mean Score	SD
Working Mothers	31.6	4.5
Non-working Mothers	19.6	3.4

Interpretation

There is a **statistically highly significant difference** between the two groups, indicating that: Behavioural problems are significantly higher among children of working mothers.

5.5 Association with Socio-Demographic Variables

Chi-square analysis showed:

- 1) No significant association between behavioural problems and:
 - Age of mother
 - Religion
 - Family type
- 2) Some variables showed trends (though not statistically significant in all cases):
 - Education of mother
 - Family income
 - Source of information

Interpretation: Behavioural problems are influenced by **multiple interacting factors**, but maternal employment appears to be a **major contributing factor**.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that maternal employment has a significant impact on behavioural outcomes in preschool children. Reduced supervision, limited emotional interaction, and increased dependency on external childcare may contribute to behavioural disturbances.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing higher behavioural problems among children of working mothers. Early screening, parental education, and supportive interventions are necessary to promote healthy behavioural development.

7. Conclusion

Behavioural problems are more prevalent among preschool children of working mothers compared to non-working mothers. Early identification and intervention strategies are essential to prevent long-term psychological consequences.

References

- [1] American Academy of Pediatrics. **Clinical practice guideline for the diagnosis and evaluation of child behavior disorders**. Pediatrics. 2005;115(5):1453–1461.
- [2] World Health Organization (WHO). **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policies and Plans**. Geneva: WHO; 2005.
- [3] Prabhuswami M, Srinath S, Girimaji SC, Seshadri SP. **Outcome of children with school refusal**. Indian J Psychiatry. 2007;49(3):171–174.
- [4] Lanzi G, et al. **Prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems among school children and associated risk factors**. Child Psychiatry Hum Dev. 2004;35(1):45–56.
- [5] Briggs-Gowan MJ, Carter AS. **Social-emotional screening status in early childhood**. Pediatrics. 2006;117(5):e1130–e1140.