
Research Article

Impact of Early Schooling on Health and Life Style of School Going Children

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Abstract:

It is generally accepted that early childhood education improves the educational performance of children. Various studies have reported a wide range of problems in children who started early schooling. These problems include Clinging to parents, nocturnal enuresis, throwing temper tantrums and bruxism. Additionally various other behavioural problems like disturbed or excessive sleeping and feeding difficulties have also been reported in these children. Many prestigious studies have concluded that children who began school at a somewhat earlier age performed less at the beginning of school, showed little or no improvement over the course of their first years of schooling, and functioned at a lesser level in third grade than children who began school at a somewhat later age. Considering the fact that the optimum age at which the schooling should begin has always been the important topic of deliberation amongst the parents as well as policy maker we conducted this observational study to find out impact of early schooling on health and life style of children. We found that those children who started early schooling suffered from various behavioral problems like clinging to parents, bedwetting, temper tantrums and sleep disturbances. We conclude that it is not desirable to send children for any kind of schooling before 3 years of age and parents should prepare children for formal education instead of sending to preparatory school before 3 years.

Keywords: Early schooling, behavioral problems, optimum age for schooling, formal education.

Introduction:

There is no doubt that early childhood is an important period of time and what a child goes through at this age can stick to his behavior throughout his or her life. The effects of schooling on children may be less striking in societies where majority of children attend school [1]. However, in developing countries where ignorance and poverty is rampant and where child labor has become a menace of giant proportion the effects of schooling can vary for instance World Bank records indicate that less than 70% of the children ages 6-11 in developing countries attended school in 1977, compared with 94 percent of the same-age children in developed countries. This gap of percentage of children attending school can make a substantial difference to the literacy rates of a future generation and hence nations [2]. A major concern in developing world is proper elementary schooling of children but to what extent early schooling can affect the later literacy is still unknown. While on one hand many studies have suggested that high-quality preschool programs and beginning

of schooling at an early age can have strong short term and long-term positive effects on social and behavioral patterns and early schooling may be responsible for early detection of some common problems seen in pediatric age group including autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder and learning disability and early detection of these conditions and an early intervention program may have a huge positive impact on these children [3]. On the other hand many studies have showed that in early childhood separation from parents can be the triggering event for later development of many behavioral and psychosocial problems. For instance while early schooling may be responsible for improvements in cognitive skills and health outcomes in short term and may appear to have some personal societal benefits of early schooling in long term it may cause various behavioral problems in children including temper tantrums, nocturnal enuresis, bruxism, feeding difficulties and sleep disturbances [4]. It must be borne in mind that early schooling many times serve purposes other than the primary purpose of education like it may be used as an alternative to providing custodial care for working parents and here school becomes a custodial home so that the parents can go for work or pursue their personal interests,

school may be used for development of social behavior, peer pressure on parents for sending children to school at a particular age [5]. Considering all these facts it can be safely concluded that though the schooling is an important aspect of an individual's life and can have enormous effect on collective society it is imperative that the optimum age for schooling should be determined keeping in mind the various studies reporting social and behavioral problems in children who start schooling before 3 years of age.

We conducted this observational study with an objective to study various health problems seen in children who started schooling at an early age. We aim to stimulate re-thinking about early schooling amongst parents as well as policy makers who may have a say in deciding the policy of schooling.

Aims & Objectives

1. To study the extent of various health problem and behavioral problems due to early schooling
2. To study the overall impact of education on children due to early schooling
3. To highlight the early schooling problems so as to stimulate re-thinking on the early childhood education.

Materials and Methods:

420 school children of age group (2½ to 6 years) from 3 urban private schools – two English medium and one mixed language in an urban area were selected for this study. Parents were interviewed with the help of a pre-set questionnaire. The questions were aimed at knowing the lifestyle and impact of education on these children. From this information various problems in each child were identified and then analyzed.

Results:

Observations

During this study we interviewed parents of 420 students belonging to age group of 2 ½ to 6 years from 3 urban private schools. Out of these 420 (55%) children 231 were boys and rest 189 (45%) were girls with a M: F ratio being 1:0.81.

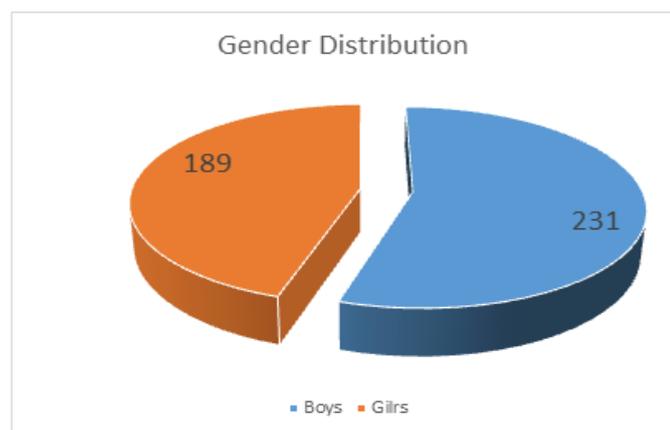


Figure 1 : Gender Distribution in the studied cases.

Since our study revealed that there were more chances of behavioral problems in children who were sent to school before 3 years of age so we divided the school going children

on the basis of whether they were more or less than 3 years of age. This analysis showed that out of 420 children 105 (25%) children belonged to the age group of less than 3 years.

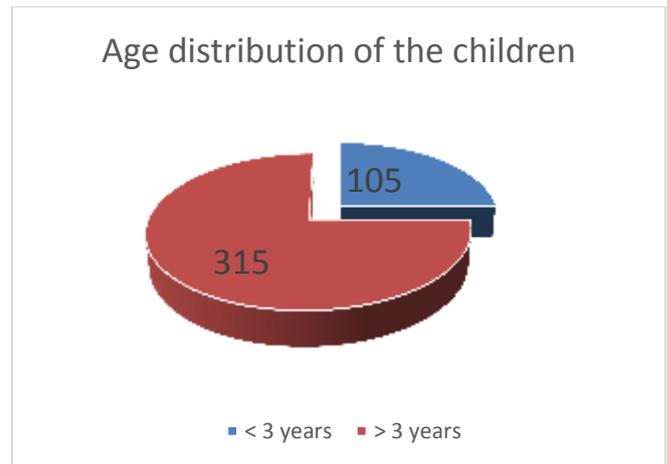


Figure 2: Age distribution in the studies cases

The analysis of parents, educational and socioeconomic status of the parents of the school going children revealed that most of the parents (80%) were graduate while 20% parents have educational levels less than graduation. Moreover all fathers were working (100%) while only 40% mothers were working while remaining 60% mothers were housewives. Out of 420 studied children 51% children belonged to joint families while 49 % belonged to joint families.

Type Of Families	Joint Families - 51%	
	Nuclear Families – 49%	
Educational Status of the Parents	Graduation-	80%
	Less than Graduate-	20%
Working Status	Fathers - 100% working	0 % Non- working
	Mothers - 40% Working	60% Housewives.

Table 1: Characteristics of the socioeconomic status of the families.

The Analysis of the reasons for which parents sent their children for early schooling revealed that in most of the cases (85%) the cause of sending children to school at an early age was because they wanted their children to learn alphabets followed by the intention to prepare them for admission to big formal school (80%) and to give children company school because the children were seen as too difficult to handle at home (52%). The other less common reasons for sending children to school included absence of anyone at home to take of the children while parents go to work (working parents) (9%) and peer pressure on parents to get their children admitted in school (Everyone else's child is going to school) (9%).

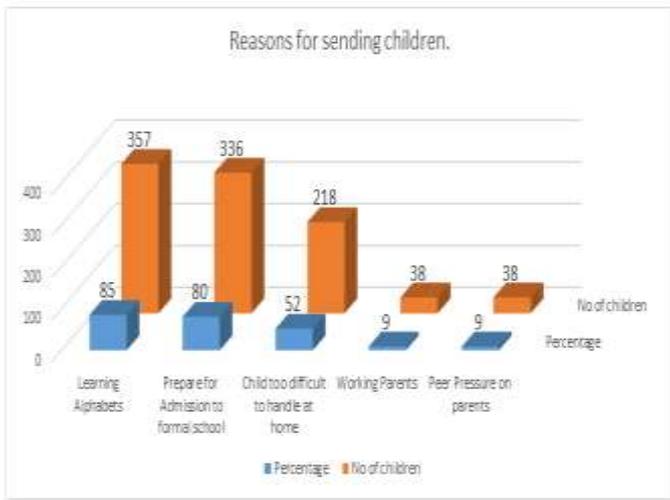


Figure 3: Reasons for sending children for early schooling

The analysis of health problems associated with early schooling revealed that 15% of these children had various health problems including constipation (85%), recurrent respiratory tract infections (15%), recurrent fever (15%), loss of appetite and failure to gain weight (10%), pains and aches (10%) and dental problem including dental caries and fluorosis (15%).

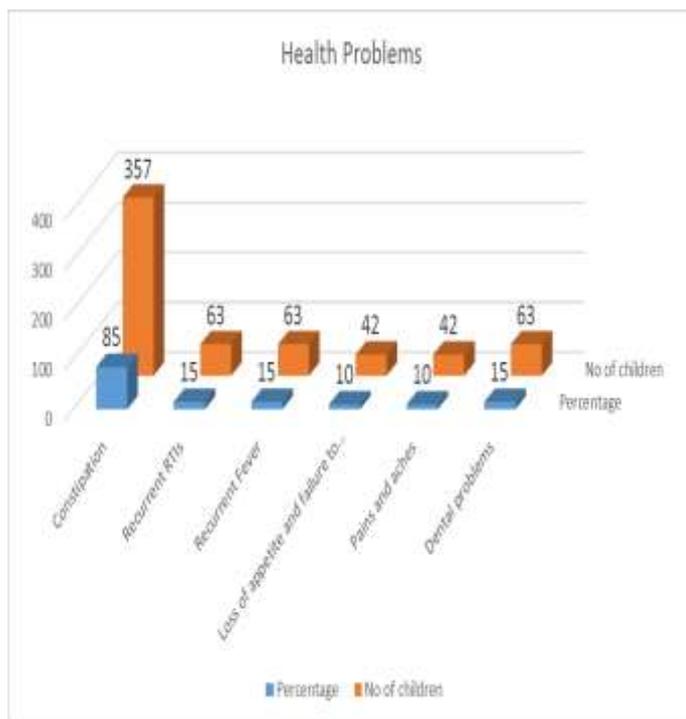


Figure 4: Health Problems in children with early schooling

The analysis of behavioral changes in these children revealed that In the age group of 3½ to 6 years children after attending the school 3 to 6 months. 75 per cent children improved. They became more social, like to go to school, they talk more, and play more and enjoy the company of other children.35% of small children 2½ to 3½ year’s age group have behavioral problem. Whereas in the age group of 3½ to 6 years. The incidence was 20 per cent. These findings suggested that the behavioral problems are more likely to occur in children below 3 years of age. Various behavioral problems seen in these children included clinging to parents which was seen in

about 20 per cent children since they started attending the school.

15 per cent children started having nocturnal enuresis who otherwise had been dry at night before they started going to the schools. About 35 per cent children started throwing temper tantrum after they started attending the preparatory school and 20 per cent children developed teeth grinding while sleeping. Feeding problems and sleep disturbances were seen in approximately 40% children.

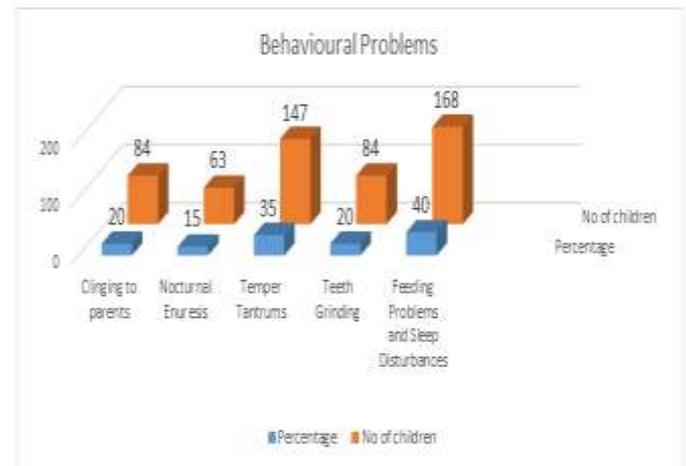


Figure 5: Behavioral Problems in children with early schooling

Discussion:

Schooling is an integral part of children’s life. Throughout the world widely the most widely expected function of early school is to provide basic educational skills like reading, writing, and comprehension [6]. But it’s a well known fact that many parents use schooling for the purpose other than the above mentioned purpose that may include but not limited to providing custodial care for children of working parents or providing children a safe place while pursue their personal interests. Some other parents may be forced to send their children to school due to peer pressure. It is in this context that many children are being sent to school at a very early age [7].

While it is a well known fact that schooling is important for development of cognitive skills there is an optimum age at which the child should be sent for schooling. Early schooling is associated with many behavioral problems in children including temper tantrums, bruxism and nocturnal enuresis. Separation of children from parents is not recommended below the age of 3 years and may lead to many psychosocial problems in later life [8].

In an study comprising of more than 900 children participating in the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care children’s academic achievement and socioemotional development were measured from the school entry to 3rd grade. With family background factors and experience in child care in the first 54 months of life controlled, hierarchical linear analysis revealed that children who entered kindergarten at younger ages had higher

(estimated) scores in kindergarten on the Woodcock-Johnson (W-J) Letter-Word Recognition subtest but received lower ratings from kindergarten teachers on Language and Literacy and Mathematical Thinking scales. Furthermore, children who entered kindergarten at older ages evinced greater increases over time on 4 W-J subtests (i.e., Letter-Word Recognition, Applied Problems, Memory for Sentences, Picture Vocabulary) and outperformed children who started kindergarten at younger age. The study concluded better development in children who entered any kind of school at an older age [9].

Another unique study by David et al dealt specifically with the point that early schooling may be detrimental to the learning of prematurely born babies. Since a significant proportion of newborns delivered prematurely are expected to survive due to advancement in neonatal care these days this aspect is important to study. The authors found that Preterm infants remain at higher risk of poor school performance and are expected to require additional educational support at primary school [10]. Their results suggested that a proportion of the social and educational difficulties seen in these infants may be avoidable by recognizing the impact that prematurity has upon school year of entry, in addition to the known impact upon cognitive and motor functions.

Conclusion:

It can be said that though schooling is an important part of overall behavioral development of children early schooling can be harmful for children. The trauma of separation from parents can cause various behavioral problems in children who are sent to school at an early age. The optimization of the minimum age at which the children should be sent to school is necessary and may depend upon various demographic and social factors. Our study found that these problems are more likely to be seen in children less than 3 years and hence we conclude from this study that it is not desirable to send children for any kind of schooling before 3 years of age.

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