



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF HOME ENVIRONMENT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOLERS OF GUJJAR TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

Environment provided by the parents, parental behaviour, their interaction with the child and other related factors such as socio personal and economic factors tend to influence the development of children. Many psychologists believe that three to six years in the life of an individual is the most important period of development especially for psychosocial wellbeing. The psychosocial and environmental variables are uniquely related to the development of young children (Jose, 1997). The present study was conducted to analyse the home environment available to tribal preschoolers as well as to assess their psychosocial development. The total sample for the study comprised of 100 preschooler-mother dyads selected from settled Gujjar families from District Udhampur. A modified version of Mohite's Home Environment Inventory and five major areas of psychosocial development, namely: Gross Motor; Vision and Fine Motor; Hearing, Language and Concept Development; Personal Skills and Social Skills of the preschoolers were assessed by using ICMR Developmental Screening Test. On spot observations were also carried out to validate the results. The findings of the study reveal that overall majority (88%) of the sample children received 'moderate' home environment as well as most children (58%) had achieved all the developmental milestones 'in time'. It was observed that in most of the cases the living rooms of sample Gujjars were not overcrowded with furniture, there were few toys available and even some play material available in the house. Mostly the neighbourhood was aesthetically pleasing, and infrastructure and play environment appeared to be safe. In case of psychosocial development, overall most (58%) of the sample children achieved all the developmental milestones 'in time'. This trend continued for both male (56%) as well as female (60%) children separately. However, 30 cases of delayed developmental milestones were noted followed by 12 sample children having 'very delayed' developmental milestones. Statistically, there was no significant difference in the level of home environment available as well as in the level of psychosocial development between male and female sample preschoolers. Statistically, the various aspects of psychosocial development were significantly correlated among each other; but the home environment was not significantly correlated with psychosocial development.

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INTRODUCTION

Early years of childhood form the basis of personality, social behaviour, and capacity to learn and nurture oneself as an adult. There is now an impressive body of evidence from a wide range of sources, demonstrating that early child development plays a vital role in affecting health, well-being and competence across the balance of the life course. Many psychologists believe that first six years in the life of an individual are the most important period of development and is extremely important in laying the foundation for a healthy and wholesome development of the personality.

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Pre-school children constitute the most vulnerable segment of any community. Child's early years are critically important, for they provide the foundation for rest of the individual's life, both as an adolescent and as an adult (Young, 2000). Psychosocial development plays important role in early years of child development as overall growth and development of children forms a major area of research in almost all parts of the developed as well as in developing world. It is a multistep process in which children learn to trust others, communicate their needs and develop distinct identities. Major developmental characteristics identified in some of the studies are mentioned as children ability to identify with their same sex parent and see them as role models, children are increasingly able to accomplish tasks on their own, and begin to make choices about what activities to pursue during preschool years (Dailey, 2008). Preschool years are

characterized by striking physical and psychological changes. Traditionally, scientists have sorted these changes into separate categories- motor, language, physical and social development. Development in each of these areas, however, affects and interacts with every other type. For example, motor development creates the need for more sophisticated speech in order to express new knowledge. There are significant advances in motor control during the preschool period. These advances depend both on physical maturation of brain and body systems and on the increasing skill that comes through practice (Berk, 2012).

For thousands of years, philosophers have expressed the belief that children's earliest experiences have the greatest impact on their development. Especially the preschool years demand new adaptations within the family as the child moves rapidly through a highly significant series of changes. In this formative period, development takes place rapidly in terms of acquisition of skills, habits, attitudes, concepts and power of observance as well as ability to think and to communicate (Manocha, 2008). Tribal communities are geographically distinct; with each tribe having its own unique customs, traditions, beliefs and practices. However, tribal populations are isolated from the general population by their own physical, socio-economic and physical environment. Many researches have shown that most of the tribes live in harmony with their environment. All this necessarily involves a highly sophisticated understanding of their local ecology (Mitchell, 2005). The surrounding environment has a strong impact on both young children's learning as well as their development. If the environment is well-designed, the child will build a sense of security, exploring in different areas that allow the children to act more independently and confidently. The environment in which the child is cared for, whether it is at home or any other place can make a significant difference in the experience of the child and parent or caregiver. It is very important that the environment provided, or chosen for the child, supports the growing child's physical, emotional, social development to a great extent (Harknes, 2011).

The foremost duty of the parents is to provide their child with need satisfaction by creating an environment conducive for their healthy social adjustment. If the overall surrounding environment favours the development of good social attitudes, the chances are that those children will become socially more intelligent. Children from favourable environment are found to be warm-hearted, outgoing and socially more intelligent than children from unfavourable environment (Kaur and Kalaramna, 2004). Many studies suggest that for the tribal children, high quality care should provide a safe, loving and nurturing environment and foster all aspects of their growth and development. The environment and materials should be both age and culturally appropriate and reflect the community traditions (Greenwood, 2005). With all these factors as prerequisite, the present study has been designed to evaluate the home environment available to preschool age children of Gujjar tribal community of Udhampur district, J&K, India. Gujjar is the most populous tribe in J & K, having a population of 763,806. Around 99% population of Gujjar tribe in J & K follow Islam. They are pastoral community that used to be nomadic but many now live in settled communities. The word 'Gujjar' is derived from the term 'Gaucharana', meaning to graze cows. Under the provisions of the Indian constitution the Gujjar are notified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in Himachal Pradesh as well as in Jammu & Kashmir. Their native

language is 'Gojri' and they follow their traditional occupation of rearing cattle, goats and sheep since ages. However, over the last few decades, Gujjars like many other nomadic groups had to deal with rapid changes to their way of life. Due to their nomadic way of life and unwillingness to move out of their forest dwellings, the peace loving, Gujjars have remained dominantly ignored in all aspects of development (UNESCO, 2011). Apart from their home environment the psychosocial development of children in terms of gross motor development, vision and fine motor development, hearing, language and concept development, personal skill and social skill development, will also be evaluated and then correlated with their available home environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample Description: The total sample size for the study comprised of 100 preschooler-mother dyads. All the selected preschoolers were aged 3-6 years, selected from settled Gujjar families of Udhampur District. Half of the sample preschoolers were boys and rest were girls.

Locale of the Study: The entire sample was selected from different areas of Udhampur District namely Battal Ballian, Camp and Kharodiyar, having high concentration of settled Gujjar tribe.

Sampling Technique: The sample for the present study was selected by random sampling technique. Udhampur District has 6 demarcated areas having high concentration of settled (non-nomadic) Gujjar tribe. Out of these, 3 areas were selected by lottery method. Once the areas were selected by snowball sampling, those Gujjar families were selected which had at least one preschooler in the age group of 3-6 years along with his/her mother. Hence, a total of 100 preschooler- mother dyads were selected from settled Gujjar families to form the core group for the study.

Tools for the Study: The following tools were used for data collection.

- **Home Environment Inventory:** A modified version of Mohite's Home Environment Inventory was used to assess the quality of home environment available to the preschoolers.
- **Psychosocial Assessment Scale:** Development of preschoolers was assessed through the use of Psychosocial Assessment Scale developed by ICMR (1999). This scale provided data on dimensions namely; Gross motor development; Vision and fine motor development; Hearing, Language and Concept development; Personal skills and Social skills. Mothers of the preschoolers were the providers of information related to development of their children.
- **On Spot Observations:** Observations were also carried out to supplement information related to home environment and psychosocial development of sample tribal preschoolers.

Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed for data analysis. Appropriate statistical techniques were used where ever applicable to support the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the present study are presented as follows:

- Provision for Home Environment Available to Preschoolers

Table 1. Provision for Home Environment Available to Preschoolers

Type of Environment	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
Poor/Lacking	03 (06%)	03 (06%)	06 (06%)
Moderate	43 (86%)	45 (90%)	88 (88%)
High	04 (08%)	02 (04%)	06 (06%)

χ^2 value = 0.712, p value = 0.700, insignificant

Home environment refers to aspects of people's domestic lives that contribute to their living conditions. The child's development is markedly influenced by the family and the surroundings into which he/she is born and grows up. Home is considered child's first environment, it sets the pattern for his/her attitudes towards people, things and life in general. Home Environment is considered vitally important in early childhood days as it ensures child's safety and protection from various surrounding elements and it's a place where the important activities of the day takes place that contribute in overall child's growth and development. Table 1 depicts the type of environment available to the sample preschoolers. Overall, most of the sample Gujjar children had 'moderate' home environment, which means that their locality and surrounding area was somewhat adequate in context of their effective growth and development although it was not very conducive and favourable. Between male and female children, calculation of Chi-square indicates that there was no significant difference in the type of environment available to them. Kaushal et al (2013) while examining the influence of home environment on psychological abilities of children of rural Haryana reported that environment had a significant influence on mental as well as social health of children.

- Home Environment Inputs to Preschoolers

Table 2. Home Environment Inputs to Preschoolers

Variables	Male (n=50)		Female (n= 50)		Total (n= 100)	
	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)
1. Interior is not dark.	17	(34%)	25	(50%)	42	(42%)
2. Well ventilated house.	11	(22%)	12	(24%)	23	(23%)
3. Availability of toys	25	(50%)	25	(50%)	50	(50%)
4. Presence of space structure.	09	(18%)	08	(16%)	17	(17%)
5. Rooms are not overcrowded.	46	(92%)	43	(86%)	89	(89%)
6. Pleasing neighbourhood	50	(100%)	45	(90%)	95	(95%)
7. Safe building and play environment.	38	(76%)	46	(92%)	84	(84%)

χ^2 value = 2.593, p value = 0.857, insignificant

The environment has a powerful effect on the development of child's competence. An environment responsive to the child's skills and stimulation, timed slightly ahead of the child's development level will accelerate a child's progress. Home environment available to sample children was assessed on seven subcategories namely, Interior of the house is well ventilated and not very dark, toys are visible in the house, there is presence of some space structure, rooms are not overcrowded, neighbourhood is pleasing and play environment and buildings are safe. Results reveal that overall most of the children had pleasing neighbourhood which implies that sample Gujjar children used to play joyfully in routine.

Mothers used to share their happiness and sorrows with the neighbours and also males used to circulate information which was of concern to them in the community. Moreover, they used to live in harmony with each other (95%), with almost no complaint about the neighbourhood. In most cases, rooms were not overcrowded with furniture as there was only one or two 'chaarpai' in rooms, one or two plastic chairs, a wooden table, a mat and rugs were present in rooms. Also the building as well as their play environment appeared to be safe (84%). Although, most of the gujjars used to live in kullas (residential hut) made up of special type of grass which are not very safe to live and some of them used to live in kaccha houses, yet the play environment around was safe as there were no dingy puddles, deep drains or any pits around the play area. However, on the other hand most of the kullas were not well ventilated and were dark inside which means that the rooms were not illuminated and appeared to be somewhat dingy as there were hardly 1 or 2 windows in the rooms and hence overall ventilation was also lacking. Toys such as bat, ball, doll, plastic bottles were seen in 50% kullas whereas presence of some spaced structure was also missing in most (83%) cases. Statistically, there was no significant difference between home environment inputs available to male and female preschool aged children. Most of the children had adequate home environment irrespective of infrastructural limitations.

- Gross Motor Development of Children

Table 3. Gross Motor Development of Children

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	23 (46%)	21 (42%)	44 (44%)
Delayed	18 (36%)	25 (50%)	43 (43%)
Very delayed	09 (18%)	04 (08%)	13 (13%)

χ^2 value = 3.154, p value = 0.206, insignificant

Gross motor development marks an important phase of growth and development in children from the very beginning as soon as child is born. During preschool years, the gross motor skills continue to develop and improve in an effective manner. Table 3 depicts the gross motor development of sample preschoolers. Results reveal that majority (46%) of male child had 'in time' gross motor development. 36% males were found to have 'delayed' gross motor development whereas 9% of them had 'very delayed' gross motor development. In case of females, 42% preschoolers achieved this milestone 'in time', majority (50%) of them showed 'delayed' gross motor development and only 4% had 'very delayed' gross motor development. Overall, most of the sample gujjar children showed adequate 'in time' gross motor development. Similar results were noted by Joanne et al (2004) who investigated the effects of a creative movement program on gross motor skills of preschool children in Taiwan. On the contrary, a study carried by Vazir et al (1998) when assessed the psychosocial development of children aged 0-6 years reported that many Indian children, especially those malnourished attained developmental milestones at a later age.

- Vision and Fine Motor Development of Children

Table 4. Vision and Fine Motor Development of Children

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	26 (52%)	22 (44%)	48 (48%)
Delayed	15 (30%)	18(36%)	33 (33%)
Very delayed	09 (18%)	10 (20%)	19 (19%)

χ^2 value = 0.659, p value = 0.309, insignificant

The development of children's vision and fine motor skills is an important foundation for the attainment of other important skills in future. Care takers and sound home environment provides experience, congenial atmosphere, resources and guidance that assist child to develop these skills. Results on vision and fine motor development of preschoolers indicates that overall (48%) majority of them showed 'in time' vision and fine motor development. This trend continued for both male (52%) as well as female (44%) children. However, in 33 and 19 cases 'delayed' as well as 'very delayed' vision and fine motor development was noted respectively. These children failed mainly in carrying out movements of thumb as well as eye lids and drawing different geometrical shapes on a paper. Similar results were forwarded by Bouchard et al (2000) and Vazir et al (1994) who studied the vision and fine motor development of children.

• Hearing, Language and Concept Development

Table 5. Hearing, Language and Concept Development

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	24 (48%)	32(64%)	56 (56%)
Delayed	11 (22%)	06 (12%)	17 (17%)
Very delayed	15 (30%)	12 (24%)	27 (27%)

χ^2 value = 0.659, p value = 0.309, insignificant

Hearing, language and concept development is an important skill that is acquired by children in early years of their life. These skills allow them to communicate and understand commands effectively. Children must develop these skills to relate with their parents and peers, as well as to grow into a person who can socially interact with others throughout life. Table 5 depicts hearing, language and concept development of gujjar preschoolers. The items where some of the children had problem were 'name three objects', 'point 2 parts of body', 'relate two objects', point 4 parts of body 'recognise 3 colours' and 'sing two lines of song/folklore'. Results reveal that majority (64%) of female child had 'in time' hearing, language and concept development. 12% and 24% females were found to have 'delayed' and 'very delayed' hearing, language and concept development respectively. In case of males, most (48%) preschoolers had 'in time' hearing, language and concept development, 22% had 'delayed' hearing, language and concept development whereas 30% males were found to have 'very delayed' hearing, language and concept development. Similar results were forwarded by Malik et al (2007) who analysed the psychosocial development of infants in an urban slum of Delhi.

• Self Help Skills

Table 6. Self help skills

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	40 (80%)	44 (88%)	84 (84%)
Delayed	06 (12%)	04 (08%)	10 (10%)
Very delayed	04 (08%)	02 (04%)	06 (06%)

χ^2 value = 1.257, p value = 0.533, insignificant

Self-help skills enable the child to meet his/her own needs and involve activities and behaviours that eventually lead to their independence. Skills such as dressing on their own, learning how to feed self appropriately or bowel control express that children are growing maturely. The results highlight that overall most of the sample preschoolers (84%) had adequate self help skills and performed most of the tasks on their own.

Only 10% children showed 'delayed' self help skills whereas 6% had 'very delayed' self help skills. Children performed their self care activities efficiently such as bathing, washing hands, combing, changing clothes etc. Contrary results were reported by Vazir et al (1998) which indicated that malnourished children aged 0-6 years attained this milestone at a later age compared to the average age of attainment of the sample children.

• Social Skill

Table 7. Social skills

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	40 (80%)	44 (88%)	84 (84%)
Delayed	06 (12%)	04 (08%)	10 (10%)
Very delayed	04 (08%)	02 (04%)	06 (06%)

χ^2 value = 1.257, p value = 0.533, insignificant

Social skills are behaviours that promote positive interaction with others and the environment. Children learn these skills from the adults and children in their environment who model and explain how to behave in particular circumstances (Ladd, 2005). Results related to social skills reveal that majority (76%) of male child had achieved social skills 'in time'. 16% males were found to have 'delayed' social skills whereas 8% of them had 'very delayed' social skills. In case of females, majority (88%) preschoolers had achieved this milestone 'in time', 8% had 'delayed' social skills and only 2 of them showed 'very delayed' social skills. However, some of the children had problems in identifying gender as well as in following and understanding the rules of games. Similar results were highlighted by (Wood, 2015) who studied a link between children's social skills in preschool years and their well-being in early adulthood and found that children who were more likely to 'share' or 'be helpful' in their early years were also more likely to obtain higher education and become more successful in their lives as compared to children who lacked this skill in their childhood days.

• Overall Developmental Status of Tribal Children

Table 8. Overall developmental status

	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=100)
In time	28 (56%)	30 (60%)	58 (58%)
Delayed	18 (36%)	12 (24%)	30 (30%)
Very delayed	04 (08%)	08 (16%)	12 (12%)

χ^2 value = 2.602, p value = 0.272, insignificant

Table 8 depicts the overall developmental status of tribal preschoolers. Results reveal that overall (58%) majority of them achieved all the milestones 'in time'. This trend continued for both male (56%) as well as female (60%) children. 30 cases of delayed developmental milestones were noted whereas 12 sample children had 'very delayed' developmental milestones. This indicates that many children of Gujjar community could potentially be suffering from delayed developments. There are chances that many of these children will have uneven patterns of development in later life as well. There is a need to provide inputs/stimulation so that those children having delayed development can achieve their full human potential. Various dimensions of psychosocial development were inter correlated with each other and with the available home environment. The results showed that the various psychosocial development dimensions were positively correlated with each other.

Table 9. Correlation between psychosocial development of preschoolers and their home environment

Variable	Gross motor development	Vision and fine motor development	Hearing, language and concept development	Self help skills	Social skills	Home environment
Gross motor development	--					
Vision and fine motor development	.540**	--				
Hearing, language and concept development	.572**	.433**	--			
Self help skills	.700**	.554**	.590**	--		
Social skills	.604**	.490**	.555**	.576**	--	
Home environment	-.055	-.004	.053	.066	-.017	--

**Correlation significant at 0.01 level

Gross motor development shared positive significant correlation with vision and fine motor development ($r=.540$, $p<0.01$), hearing, language and concept development ($r=.572$, $p<0.01$), self help skills ($r=.700$, $p<0.01$) and social skills ($r=.604$, $p<0.01$). Vision and fine motor development also shared positive significant correlation with hearing, language and concept development ($r=.433$, $p<0.01$), self help skills ($r=.554$, $p<0.01$) and social skills ($r=.490$, $p<0.01$).

Hearing, language and concept development also shared positive significant correlation with self help skills ($r=.590$, $p<0.01$) and social skills ($r=.555$, $p<0.01$). Self help skills shared positive significant correlation with social skills ($r=.576$, $p<0.01$). Since all dimensions of psychosocial development were positively significantly correlated amongst each other, this indicates that different domains of development can significantly and linearly affect each other. However, the home environment was not significantly correlated with any dimension of development for the sample preschoolers. Probably the development of these children is influenced by factors other than their home environment.

Conclusion

Pre-school children constitute the most vulnerable segment of any community. Child's early years are critically important, for they provide the foundation for rest of the individual's life, both as an adolescent and as an adult. It is a unique opportunity period for every individual where they undergo significant social, intellectual, emotional and physical development. Therefore seeking on the development during preschool years is so relevant and apt (Mustard, 2000). A healthy environment is necessary for the overall growth and development of preschoolers. The home environment both in terms of physical environment and resources as well as the human interaction especially the nature and quality of stimulation available are extremely high predictors of a child's psychosocial developmental status. A child's early home environment has a profound effect on his/her overall well-being. Many studies suggest that children are motivated to work on activities and learn new information and skills when their home environment is rich in interesting activities that arouse their curiosity and offer moderate challenges in their day to day life (Schunk et al, 2010). The importance of adequate psychosocial development cannot be discounted for any child. The period of early years is especially crucial for laying the foundations of a later healthy and well developed adult. One development is significantly related and dependent on another developmental domain and vice versa. Preschool years find a special mention in researches as a stage of rapid and significant developmental attainments. Many variables have further been noted to affect the developmental status of the children directly and indirectly (Dailey, 2008).

Child's early home environment has a profound effect on his well-being. Beginning in early childhood, a problematic home environment can disrupt the brain's stress response system, reduce the quality of caregiving a child receives, and interfere with healthy development. Many studies have linked children's negative home environment during children's early years with a host of developmental problems including poorer language development, later behaviour problems, deficits in school readiness, aggression, anxiety and depression as well as impaired psychosocial development (Evans et al, 2010). Some of the studies also suggest that various home factors have been shown to be important such as mother's responsiveness, discipline style, and involvement with the child; organization of the environment; availability of appropriate learning materials; opportunities for daily stimulation that eventually affects child's psychosocial development to a greater extent (Meece, 2002). The findings of the present study highlight that inspite of their disadvantaged living conditions, most of the sample Gujjar preschoolers had 'moderate' home environment available. This trend continued for both male as well as female children separately. In most of the cases the rooms of sample Gujjars were not overcrowded with furniture, there were some toys and other play material available in the house, neighbourhood was aesthetically pleasing, and infrastructure and play environment appeared to be safe. This indicates that Gujjar families paid ample attention towards creating a congenial home environment. Their homes were safe, secure and well managed especially as far as their children were concerned.

In case of psychosocial development of Gujjar children overall most (58%) of the sample children achieved all the developmental milestones 'in time'. This trend continued for both male (56%) as well as female (60%) children separately. However, some of these children also showed 'delayed' (30%) as well as 'very delayed' (12%) developmental milestones. The findings imply that many of the tribal Gujjar children may be 'at risk' for developmental delays/lags. There is a need to carry out comprehensive assessment of such children, so that the effect of such developmental delays can be reduced. Early screening should be mandatory for all children including the tribal children. Researches have shown how a vast majority of Indian children are malnourished and suffer from delayed development. A broad based screening and assessment strategy should be developed so that all children who constitute the 'at risk' population are identified. Those who are identified to fall in the 'delayed' or 'very delayed' categories of psychosocial development need to be provided some intervention and inputs to overcome their problems. Through training and sustained efforts, definitely the developmental status of such children can be improved. This piece of work also suggests that there can be improvement in their overall psychosocial development by providing them more stimulating environment to live and

by carrying out some effective interventional programmes for the welfare of tribals comprising of children and parents/caregivers. The findings of the study clearly demonstrates that many preschool age children of tribal Gujjar children suffer from developmental delays/lags. There is a need to understand various causative factors leading to this high incidence. Researches directed towards exploring the potential reasons for the same need to be carried out. Specific interventions focusing on overcoming this uneven pattern of development need to be planned and executed.

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