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Article

# Conduct Problems in Children Attending Pre-Primary Schools in Rural Areas of Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The aim of this study was to explore the conduct problems faced by school going children in the rural areas of Pakistan. Two hypotheses were formulated to explore the significant differences between the intervention and non-intervention groups and gender on the variables of conduct and internalization. The data of a total 386 young children were collected from three different regions, who were enrolled in government pre-primary classes. The children under study comprised two kinds of schools: intervention schools that had early childhood interventions, and non-intervention schools. The data analysis revealed no significant difference between children in intervention and non-intervention schools. However, there was a gender difference found in the variables of conduct and internalization. The conclusion of the study was framed to provide implications of the study for professionals.*

**Keywords:** young children behavior, early school behavior, conduct problems

## Introduction

Young children with behavioural problems display several inappropriate actions that might result in small conflicts, peer rivalry, drop out, school unhappiness, and failure. Many studies have indicated that children fighting with their peers during their early childhood have shown a resulting fall in their academic grades (Eggen & Kauchak, 1999).There are two types of behavioural problems: externalizing and internalizing. Those who fall in the externalizing category, demonstrate characteristics such as hyperactivity, non-cooperation, hostility, and cruelty. These children often do not respond to typical rules and consequences. Male children are three times more likely to be labelled as having externalizing behavioural problems than female. School behaviour has been explored and perceived by the researchers as more significant than the literacy skills for students' accomplishment in pre-primary school.

Young children learn while interacting with peers, assisting others, sharing resources, and following directions of the teachers (Del'Homme, 1994). Research studies and empirical experiences of the teachers have demonstrated that pre-school behaviour has an implication in the later life of a student.

In the context of education, conduct problems in young children are observed mainly in classroom settings. Educationists and researchers in educational settings have often considered the insights from applied psychology to describe this particular trait of young children in academic settings (Church, 2003).

## Literature Review

Researchers have defined conduct behaviour in the educational settings as behaviour of children who are hyperactive in the classroom, often make loud noise, distract other class fellows or teachers, possess low or poor attention span, show resistance in most of the proposed class activities, and hit their class fellows. These conducts have also been considered as anti-social behaviour by many psychologists (Caspi, 2002).

Children from the rural setup often enter school with the exposure of various risk factors. They come from poor, malnutritioned and less aware families that allow them the space to make it to pre-schools, but fail to provide them with the appropriate school readiness skills (Raver, 2003). Conduct behaviour in development psychology means distracting others and being destructive. If taken account of early childhood development settings, such behaviours are frequently observed in the classrooms. Conduct in early education settings can be considered as the disruptive behaviour that offends peers and teachers. It is the outward behaviour of young children, whereas it is claimed in the research that all the apparent behaviour is the outcome of inner dysfunction and internalization. Developmental psychologists are in a constant effort to study the behaviour of young children and provide comprehensive definitions, models, and structures to define their behavioural skill set.

Internalization behaviours are often considered as withdrawal from social events, preference for loneliness, feeling of guilt, depression, and internalization. Students with behavioural problems often have deficiency in monitoring and controlling their behaviour. Such behaviour is in the inner state of children which makes them nervous, introvert, shy, disturbed, and dejected. These often centrally impact children's psycho social state. This further influences them to instantly react in a negative manner in their external environment. Children in school who face problems of internalization in their daily routine activities are the ones suffering from trivial behavioural problems. Evidence has been given in various research studies that such children tend to have problems in behaviour management in their later life (Seligman & Ollendick, 1998). Students with behavioural problems can be difficult to manage and teach as they frustrate their teachers. The teacher and the caregiver in the environment can support by facilitating and creating a conducive learning environment that encourages learners to participate and progress while providing structure through clearly stated and uniformly enforced rules and expectations (Cooper, 1993; Cooper, 1998; Garner, 1993; Thomas & Renshaw, 2004; Walsh, 2003).

Internalization is typical and of assistance when it is experienced in a challenging situation. The child appears to act shy or hesitant in a strange or new environment. Many researches have indicated that it is

normal since the majority of people find it difficult to speak in public for the first time or even after several trials. Children in early years experience various kinds of anxiety, fear, and anticipated outcomes of their behaviour. It is often noticeable in their behaviour that when one cries, the older ones remain silent and shy; and when children in school cry, others shiver, or like to be in isolation (Jocobs, 2002; Lukaruaki, 2002). However, it is often difficult to identify the reason behind the internalization of the children. As most of the children are not very expressive, they also tend to hide their feelings and anxieties from their parents and teachers. There are many sources of internalization that are inbuilt in the developmental health of a young child. It has been found in researches that young children tend to face and experience fear and worry quite easily (Woolfolk, Davis, & Pape, 2006). In the early childhood, children who experience severe internalization might show pessimism, and approach circumstances negatively in the later phases of their lives.

It has been experienced by teachers and often illustrated by researchers that children who suffer from internalization problems seldom find it challenging to get back to their normal state without counselling. Internalization also becomes a problem when it influences a child's routine patterns and responses towards new learning opportunities (Evans, 2007). Hence, it is vital for teachers to focus on providing nurturing care and affection. Young children in school experience a wide range of behaviour modifications and experiences. As children grow and get acquainted with the learning environment, they also learn various behavioural patterns and adopt and assimilate them. Likewise, there are certain behaviours which are considered problematic where the child as well as other children in schools are affected (Saleem, 2004; McClellan, 1999; Kattz & McClellan, 1997). Hence, as teachers, many behavioural theories of reinforcement, reward versus punishment, and patterning are taught in order to identify, modify, and deliver planned interventions for behavioural modification that can be initiated by a teacher in such situations (McClellan & Kinsey, 1999; Kattz & McClellan, 1997 & Dowling, 2005).

Many researches from the west support this phenomenon; however, there is a lack of research on this topic in Pakistan. This study will explore school behaviour of young children in public pre-primary

schools of Pakistan, with intervention and without intervention. The following hypotheses have been established based on the literature review:

1. There will be a significant difference on the variables of conduct and internalization amongst children with early childhood intervention compared to non-intervention.

2. There will be a significant gender difference on the variables of conduct and internalization behaviour.

## Methodology

### *Design*

Quantitative exploratory research design was used for the study. This was the most preferred design for the researchers since the major aim of the study was to explore early school behaviour and it allowed the researchers to explore various components of the phenomenon in general.

### *Participants*

The data of young children ages ranging between 5 -6 years (N = 386, Male = 138, Female = 248) were collected from government pre-primary classes also known as katchi-jamat

(Intervention Schools = 180), (Non Intervention Schools = 206) in local terms. The data were collected from three different regions of the country (Sindh = 98, Balochistan = 112, Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral = 176). The participants were selected using a two-fold sampling method; firstly the government schools in the intervention areas with an ECE intervention and without an ECE intervention were sent informed consent letters.

### *Measures*

***School information form.*** This consisted of four items that focused on the basic information, such as name of the school, name of the child, school status, and region. The reason for selecting limited demographic

variables was to provide fewer constraints to the teachers who were filling in the questionnaire.

***Individual student information indicators.*** One indicator was added in the actual scale to ensure the gender of the child.

***Early School Behaviour Scale (ESBS)***. This is a brief screening tool developed by Piants, (1991) to measure competencies and behaviour problems for children aged 4-6 years. In this study, two sub scales of conduct and internalization were used. Conduct consisted of 9 items with a four point Likert scale and internalization consisted of 17 items with a four point

Likert scale. All the items were neutrally termed. The scale was translated and a pilot study was carried out to explore the reliability of the tool in a Pakistani context. The translated scale on the sample appeared to be highly consistent with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.83.

### *Procedures*

The schools were identified randomly and an informed consent was sought from the school head teachers and class teachers of the young children for the study. After the consent and voluntary participation acceptance of the teachers, the teachers were given a brief orientation of the current study and school behaviour before requesting them to fill in the forms based on the observations of the students who fit into the inclusion criteria.

## Results

Hypothesis 1: *There will be a significant difference on the variables of conduct and Internalization regarding early school behaviour of RCC and Non-RCC children.*

Table 1

Comparison Between Intervention and Non-Intervention School Children on the Variables of Conduct and Internalization

| Variables | Group | N | Mean | S.D. | t | df | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conduct | Intervention | 180 | 17.5 | 6.3 | .452 | 384 | .652 |
| | Non-Intervention | 206 | 17.2 | 5.3 | | | |
| Internalization | Intervention | 180 | 33.6 | 5.1 | -1.522 | 384 | .129 |
| | Non-Intervention | 205 | 34.6 | 8.1 | | | |

There was no significant difference between intervention and non-intervention children on the variable of conduct (t=.452, P > .05). Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between intervention children and mon-intervention children in respect of conduct behaviours since the p value is greater than the alpha level .05. Likewise, there was no significant difference between RCC and non-RCC children on the variable of Internalization (t= -1.522, P > .05). Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between RCC children and Non-RCC children in respect of Internalization behaviours since the p value is greater than the alpha level .05.

Hypothesis 2: *There will be a significant gender difference on the variables of conduct and Internalization.*

Table 2

Comparison Between Male and Female Children on the Variables of Conduct and Internalization

| Variables | Group | N | Mean | S.D. | t | df | sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conduct | Male | 138 | 19.6 | 6.6 | 5.8 | 384 | .000 |
| | Female | 248 | 16.1 | 4.8 | | | |
| Internalization | Male | 138 | 33.2 | 5.1 | -2.05 | 384 | .040 |
| | Female | 248 | 34.7 | 7.6 | | | |

According to the results, gender difference was found on the variable of conduct between the male and female children ($t = 5.8$, $P < .01$). Hence, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between male children and female children in respect of conduct behaviours since the p value is greater than the alpha level .05. Also, gender difference was found on the variable of Internalization on both male and female students ($t = -2.05$, $P < .05$). Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between male children and female children in respect of conduct behaviours since the p value is less than the alpha level .05.

## Discussion

As for hypothesis one, there was no significant difference found between RCC and Non-RCC children on the variable of Conduct ($t=0.813$, $P > .05$). Likewise, no significant difference was observed between RCC and Non-RCC children on the variable of Internalization ($t= -0.968$, $P > .05$). These findings reveal that in the overall problem behaviour, there were no statistically significant differences found in RCC and non RCC children. These findings have been in consistent with the research studies by various researchers (Arseneault, Moffit, Taylor, Rijsdijk, Jaffee & Measelle, 2003; Eyberg, Funderburk, Hembree-Kigin, McNeil, Querido & Hood, 2001; Rosenbaum, O'Leary & Jacob, 1975; Verhulst & Derende, 1992; Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992).

These findings can be related to demographic settings and theoretical frameworks. In the theoretical perspective, behavioural problems have been defined differently by different psychologists and educationists as misconduct and an action that does not result in an expected positive outcome. Swin and Watson (2011) define behavioural problems as harmful acts that distract the activities or people who are in the same situation as the deliverer. Behaviour is also listed in five categories of a person showing: anger, dissipation, rebelliousness, disturbance, and misconduct (Lukes & Tara, 2011). Similarly, researchers have also recognized a variety of affecting factors for children's misconduct. Young children in educational settings show conduct and internalization as usual behavior to seek the attention of the care-giver, to gain control, to show, retribution towards their peers, and also to make their teacher feel that they are disliked by the young children (Dreikurs, 2004; UMES, 1999).

One of the apparent influencing factors is the impact of families and parents of young children on the behaviour of a young child. In the Pakistani context, young children develop conduct and internalization issues often from homes and early educational settings, where strict policies and corporal punishments are enforced, giving rise to their behavioural issues. The caregivers' constant irritating attitude results in children being resentful and reactive towards them (Bernstein, 2006). Care giving in the rural setup of Pakistan is mostly authoritative children coming from low socioeconomic setups and families where domestic violence is a usual norm, tend to have difficulty in competing with other children and regard themselves as deprived and low. Similarly, children who face controlled parenting at home also exhibit aggressive behaviour in the classrooms, as a way to vent their frustration (David, 2001). Since the parenting practices are generally the same in almost all rural contexts of Pakistan, this may be one of the affecting factors among children not showing difference in their problematic behaviour regardless of being exposed to an intervention.

Another reason that can complement the above findings could be teacher- child interaction and its influence on the young child. This has also been argued in various studies that any behaviour is considered appropriate or inappropriate based on the situation that it has occurred in and the people playing a role in that situation (Charles, 1999). Moreover,

the adults and caregivers of young children in school settings have a large influence on their behavioural development and subsequent issues related to it. This is observed in many of the rural public school settings with or without the intervention that the teachers seem to have a controlling disposition towards young children. Typically in such settings, teachers present themselves as authoritative and discourage students to participate in teacher led lesson delivery. Since teachers in general are not provided training in the behavioural modification techniques, most of the emphasis is on pedagogical skills for instructional teaching. This aspect leads to a loss of confidence among many students and feel worthless, which in the later stages of their lives result in misconduct and internalization.

The second hypothesis revealed gender difference as a noticeable variable of conduct between the male and female children ($t = 2.6$, $P < .05$). These findings are in accordance with the research studies and literature (Averill, 1983; Campbell, 1995; Caspi et al, 2002; Gneezy, Leonard & List, 2008; Hussein, & Mahmud, 2007; Stoner & Spencer, 1986; Willoughby et al, 2001). The causes that can be prophesied for the significant difference on the variable of conduct can be connected to the theoretical framework. According to the evolutionary psychology perspective and empirical research studies conducted around the world, a number of researchers have acknowledged the behavioural differences between young girls and boys. Psychologists from the 21st century claim that there is confluence in the theoretical development that recognizes distinct patterns of social and pro-social behaviour amongst young girls and boys with regard to social engagement, peer relationships, interaction with adults and showing aggression (Willoughby et al, 2001).

Many researches from the psychological and anthropological fields have indicated a positive and significant difference between the expression of girls and boys in respect of anger and coping mechanism (Devine, 2000; Lewis, 1993; Plant, Hyde, & Keltner).

In the Pakistani context, young children from the early years of their lives are given a checklist of behavioural patterns that are regarded culturally appropriate and specific to their gender. Young boys are conditioned to behave in a particular manner like their fathers and male

members of the family. They are given more autonomy and choices by their family. Likewise, more freedom and liberty is given to the boys as compared to girls who live with restrictions and lesser freedom. On the contrary, young girls from their very childhood are taught to obey their brothers, to be receptive, and to accept that the authority in a household and decision making rest with the male members of the family and they must limit themselves to domestic chores and delicate work, demonstrating their feminity.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it can be opined that early behaviour of young children is an outcome of various factors like gender discrimination, geographical differences, and school experiences. Numerous referred research studies in this paper show similar results. The findings of the present study recommend education program managers, school teachers, and policy makers to give significance to this neglected phenomenon because the study has established that there were differences found in the children who were not under intervention as compared to the ones who were under a strong intervention.

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