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Family income and general abilities of preschool children: A study

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Abstract

The present study was conducted in Ayodhya district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of family income on general abilities of pre-school children. Sample of the study comprised 32 girls and 68 boys of age between 3 to 5 years. Standardized Mc Carthy scales of children's abilities by Dorothea Mc Carthy (1972) was administered to find out the impact of family income on general abilities of pre-school children. Data was analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage and chi-square (χ^2). Statistical analysis revealed that there is significant relationship between general abilities of pre-school children and their family income. It was found that children with high family income have high general abilities as compared to children with low family income.

Keywords: Family income, pre-schoolers, general abilities

Introduction

Pre-school years are vital years, extending from end of infancy to about 5 or 6 years. During this period the foundation for thinking, language, vision, attitude, aptitudes and other characteristics are laid down (Santrock, 1997) ^[1]. Ability is a general word for power, native or acquired, enabling one to do things well. It is the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally and to deal effectively with his environment (Wechsler, 1965) ^[13]. When we speak of early child development we speak broadly of both cognitive and social-behaviour development in the first five years of life. We are concerned presently with cognitive development, which is characterized primarily by the development of language and pattern recognition (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998) ^[14]. Numerous studies have indicated that household income, or the income earned by the child's primary caretaker, is one of the most significant determinant in a child's cognitive development (Duncan *et al.*, 1994) ^[7]. Children in poverty or low income household exhibit poorer cognitive functioning prior to and during the first few years of elementary school, as compared to children from higher income household (Blatchford & Plewis, 1990) ^[4].

Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below poverty line for multiple years appear, all other things being equal, to suffer the worst outcome. The timing of poverty also seems to be important for certain child outcome. Children who experience poverty during their pre-school and early school years have lower rates of school completion than children who experience poverty only in later years. Poor children suffer higher incidences of adverse health, developmental, and other outcomes than non poor children.

The family income has stronger effect on cognitive and verbal ability test scores than it has an indices of emotional health in the childhood years. Salkind and Haskins (1982) found that, children living below the poverty household are 1.3 times as likely as non poor children to experience learning disabilities and developmental delays.

In 1988, National Health Interview Survey, parents reported that poor children were only two third as likely to be in excellent health and almost twice as likely to be in fair or poor health as non poor children. The findings focused on the relationship of poverty to several key measures of child health, low birth weight and infant mortality, growth stunting and lead poisoning. The timing of poverty is also important although this is based on only a small number of studies. Low income during the pre-school years exhibits the strongest relationship with low rates of school completion, as compared with low income during the childhood years.

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Research methodology

Selection of locale

The research was carried out in district Ayodhya of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It was purposively selected for the study because of logistic convenience in University of Agriculture & Technology, Kumarganj, Faizabad (U.P.), where the investigator had been pursuing studies.

Samples and its selection: Four schools were selected purposively by purposive sampling. The list of pre-school between age range of 3-5 years was prepared. One hundred pre-school children (25 from each school) in which 32 girls and 68 boys were randomly selected by simple random sampling. Mc Carthy scales of children’s abilities (1972) was administered individually to assess the general abilities of pre-school children. It includes six subscales:

- a. Verbal scale (V)
- b. Perceptual performance (P)
- c. Quantitative (Q)
- d. General cognitive (GC)
- e. Memory (Mem)
- f. Motor (Mot)

An interview schedule was used to collect background information of the respondents. Data was analyzed in terms of percentage, frequency and chi-square (χ^2).

Results and Discussion

Table-1 shows that 15.38 per cent girls had family income upto 10000 Rs. per month had high general abilities, 38.47 per cent had average and 46.15 per cent girls had low general abilities. 7.69 per cent girls with family income Rs. 10000 to 20000 per month had high general abilities, 69.23 per cent had average general abilities and 23.07 per cent girls had low general abilities, 66.77 per cent girls with family income ranging between Rs. 20000 to 30000 per month had high general abilities, 33.33 per cent had average general abilities and none was found to have low general abilities. On other hand 18.75 per cent boys with family income upto 10000 Rs.

per month had high general abilities, 43.75 per cent boys had average and 37.50 per cent had low general abilities. Majority of boys (52.78 per cent) with family income ranging between Rs. 10000 to 20000 per month had high general abilities and 38.89 per cent belonged to average general abilities, while only 8.33 per cent boys had low general abilities.

Statistical analysis (chi-square) results show a significant relationship between family income and general abilities of pre-school children. The results supports the earlier findings of Bradly and Crownly (2002) [6] who investigated that families with a higher socio-economic status have a better chance of converting economic resource into quality parenting and interactive resource. The families under economic stress are less likely to monitor their children’s activities, and lack of monitoring is associated with poor school performance and social adjustment (Bolger *et al.*, 1995) [5]. Children from poverty environments have higher rates of birth defects and early disabilities; they recover less well from early problems; they are more often ill and malnourished throughout their childhood years. Typically, they also have lower IQs and move more slowly through the sequences of cognitive development.

Arranz (2005) [2] reported that there is significant association between high socio-economic status and more advance cognitive development. The pre-school education for young children in poverty can greatly influence their cognitive abilities and this leads to long term increase in achievements and school success (Barnett, 2001) [3]. Bradly and Crownly (2003) [6] also found that there is significant relationship between high level of socio-economic status and high level of cognitive development. The association between family income (low income) and children’s cognitive test scores using data from second generation found that family poverty has a significant association with lower test scores in children of all (3 to 9) years. Thus it appears that families still should be viewed as key agents in promoting positive development in children (Andrew and Heather, 2001) [1].

Table-1: General abilities of pre-school children with respect to family income/month

S. No.	Family income/ month	Girls (n=32)					Boys (n=68)				
		n	General abilities of pre-schoolers			χ^2	n	General abilities of pre-schoolers			χ^2
			High	Average	Low			High	Average	Low	
1.	Upto-10000	13	2 (15.38)	5 (38.47)	6 (46.15)	12.80	32	6 (18.75)	12 (37.50)	14 (43.75)	9.84
2.	10000-20000	13	1 (7.69)	9 (69.23)	3 (23.07)		36	19 (52.78)	14 (38.89)	3 (8.33)	
3.	20000-30000	6	4 (66.67)	2 (33.33)	-		-	-	-	-	
Total		32 (100)	7	16	9	68 (100)	25	26	17		

Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage Table value = 9.48 at 5% LS and 4 DF

Conclusion

It may be concluded from the results of above study that children with high family income have high general abilities as compared to children with low family income. Thus, the study shows a significant relationship between family income and general abilities of pre-school children.

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