

Behavioural problems among the pre-school children of migrant mothers in Sri Lanka

The influence of employment status of the mother on the behavior of pre-school children from lower socio-economic groups was studied using a cross sectional approach. Children of mothers employed overseas were studied in comparison with a group, whose mothers were employed in Sri Lanka and a group whose mothers were not employed. The three groups were matched for age and sex.

An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect information on socioeconomic status of the children, child care practices and psychosocial environment. "Home risk factors" in the Child Health Development Record for the pre-school children was one way of studying the psychosocial environment. Specific questions were asked on quantity and quality of child care given. A checklist developed by Richman and Graham, which had been modified and adopted for Sri Lanka, was used to study the behavior of children.

Some of the variables which were differently distributed between the three groups were educational level of the parents, marital discord and quality of care given to the children. The highest proportion of children with abnormal behavior was seen among the children of mothers employed overseas.

Women of lower income groups seek employment overseas, in order to improve their economic standards, which they expect may lead to a better quality of life. The pre-school children of these mothers seem to be an important group for which special child welfare activities should be aimed at.