

## **International**

### **Preschool Attendance, Health, Behavior, and Caregiver Involvement Among South African Children: Lessons for Head Start**

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Research tells us that physical and social/emotional health influence the development of children's academic skills (NRC, 2000; NRC, 2001). Many South African children live in resource-poor communities (World Bank, 2005). In the presence of such risks and stressors, children's capacity for school and future success are threatened. The purpose of the study was to explore relationships among children's characteristics that may impact their school performance (e.g., living with/without parents, health status, preschool attendance, behavior, caregiver involvement in school). The sample consisted of 687 children from 25 preschools in 6 rural townships in Free State, South Africa. A South African NGO, Ntataise, developed an English-language survey consisting of closed- and open-ended questions focused on topics such as: family, household, and housing arrangements; health; preschool attendance, behavior, and caregiver involvement. A local health trainer conducted the survey with teachers asking them questions about individual children attending their preschools. Weighted sampling procedures were used to ensure equal representation. Responses to questions were dichotomously coded. Pearson analyses were performed to test the hypothesis of no association between the variables. Odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals were calculated. Results were as follows, across all townships: Caregiver Arrangements: 18% of children lived with non-parent caregivers; 3.3% of children were orphans; grandparents (especially grandmothers) made up to 78% of non-parent caregivers. School Attendance, Health, and Behavior: 13.3% of children had poor/irregular school attendance; 9.8% had chronic health problems, such as bronchitis/chronic cough, asthma, pneumonia, hearing problems); 5.2% of children displayed behavioral concerns at school, such as shyness, fighting, biting, temper tantrums, unpredictability). Caregiver Involvement in Preschool: 90.7% of parents/caregivers often or sometimes attended school meetings; 81% parents/caregivers often or sometimes helped out at preschool. Whether or not a child lived with his/her parent(s) was not related to his/her health status, school behavior, or school attendance. However, parents who lived with their children were more likely to attend preschool meetings and help out at school, and those who attended school meetings were more likely to have children with better school attendance than parents who did not live with their children. Caregiver attendance at meetings and help at school was not related to child behavior or health status. Children with chronic health problems were more likely to have poor/irregular school attendance and to exhibit challenging school behaviors than children without chronic health problems. Several analyses by township were performed, but few significant differences in variables of interest were identified. Head Start could view the level of parent involvement in SA as an incentive to increase their current levels, despite challenges. In South Africa, cohesive rural communities provide support to orphaned children and children living with non-parent caregivers; preschools are the focal point for mobilization of communities – motivation for Head Start to develop ways to increase “collective efficacy.”

### ***References***

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## **Young Children's Social-Emotional Skills in High and Low DAP Indonesian Preschools**

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Three dimensions of children's social-emotional skills (assertiveness, aggressiveness, and submissiveness) were studied in 32 Indonesian preschools varying on structural Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) measures. Parallel to the U.S. understanding of low and high DAP, preschools in Jakarta can be divided into modern and traditional. Modern preschools used curricula that encourage learning based on children's interests, independence through making choices, and self-initiative through play. In these programs, one teacher typically works with eight or fewer children (Setiadarma & Laing, 2003). The classroom is arranged into different interest areas to facilitate active learning. Curricula are compatible with Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredenkamp and Copple, 1997). Traditional preschools use the Indonesian Department of Education's Guidelines that emphasize conformity and group instruction. These preschools typically have larger teacher-student ratios; children learn together as a group for most of the day. Teachers often have rigid expectations for children's behavior.

The following research questions were examined: (1) Do children enrolled in high DAP preschools show more advanced social-emotional skills than children enrolled low DAP classrooms? (2) Are teachers' and mothers' ratings of children's social-emotional development related? (3) Do boys and girls differ significantly in their social-emotional skills? Four subscales of the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale revised edition (ECERS-R)* (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) were used to measure the environmental/school quality. The *Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS)* (Arnett, 1989) was the measure of teacher interaction quality with children. An adapted version of the *Children Action Tendency Scale (CATS)* (Deluty, 1979) was used to assess three dimensions of children's social-emotional development. Data were collected in Jakarta, Indonesia in fall 2004. Programs were classified as high or low DAP. Thirty two classroom teachers, one from each preschool, reported 245 children's behavior. One hundred and fifty seven mothers returned questionnaires that could be used in the analysis (64%). Children ranged in age from 4-0 to 5-11 years ( $M = 4.8$  years), 98% of them come from two-parent households. During a two- to three- hour classroom observation using the ECERS-R and the CIS (inter-rater agreement above .90 for each scale), program quality were assessed. Eight children in each school, with as close to an equal number of boys and girls as possible, were randomly selected. After giving voluntary informed consent, mothers and teachers were asked to rate each child's skills. Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling revealed that children in high DAP preschools showed more advanced social-emotional skills than children in low DAP classrooms. The results show that students in higher levels of DAP classrooms were rated by teachers as more assertive, even after controlling family SES and gender. Mothers' and teachers' ratings of children's social-emotional development were also correlated. In general, teachers rated girls to be more assertive and boys to be more aggressive. Overall, results of the present study support the expansion of DAP as one strategy to support the development of social-emotional skills, including conflict resolution, among Indonesian children.

## **References**

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