
The Effect of Health Education on Mother's Awareness about Child mental health

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ABSTRACT

This is a prospective study which attempts to assess and raise the mothers awareness towards pre-school children psychological development in A1 Nasr Area in Medani City. Fifty mothers were selected randomly and were subjected to a health education programme. Pre and post surveys and focus group discussions were conducted, so as to compare the level of mothers awareness before and after health education and training of mothers. A manual was developed to educate mothers about psychological development at pre-school age . Interpersonal communication with mothers through home visits, and distribution of home care cards were major stratgies.

Six months later, following the base line and intervention phases, evaluation was conducted using the post survey and focus group discussions to the same group of mothers.

The results indicated that there was an observable interest among mothers concerning the knowledge about the importance of mental health education as apart of the socialization process.

ملخص الدراسة

تمت هذه الدراسة بهدف تقييم دور التثقيف الصحي ومدى فعاليته في تبصير الامهات بمتابعة النمو النفسي لطفل ما قبل المدرسة .

تم اجراء هذه الدراسة بحي النصر بمدينة ودمدني، وقد تم الاختيار العشوائي للامهات بهذه المنطقة لإجراء الدراسة.

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وقد استخدم المسح الميداني وحلقات النقاش قبل وبعد تنفيذ البرنامج للوقوف على مدى وعي الامهات بصحة الطفل النفسية. وقد تم تبصير الامهات بمراحل النمو النفسي للأطفال عبر برنامج متكامل شمل: محاضرات/حلقات نقاش / عروض فيديو امتد لفترة ستة أشهر، تم بعدها تقييم مدى فعالية البرنامج واستفادة الامهات منه.

وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الوعي النفس بمراحل نمو الطفل بين الامهات قد تحسن بصورة ملموسة، وأن هناك اهتماماً ملحوظاً بأهمية صحة الطفل النفسية كركيزة هامة في عملية التنشئة الاجتماعية

Introduction:

This study attempts to assess and raise the mothers awareness towards pre-school children psychological development in Wad Medani city.

Mothers play an important and effective role in the socialization process, and the rearing of children is considered to be largely a female responsibility.

The pre-school child mostly acquires new behaviour by imitation and observational learning, and his perception to the world starts within the family. The attitudes, values, believes, action and health behaviour that are adopted in early childhood are likely to resist change¹.

Current interest in young child psychology started only in this century and children psychological problems became a focus of concern. Psychologists and others, who work with children are attempting to reach a consensus on children's. rights, that might serve as a frame work for policy regarding the care and treatment of the young child. Each child has the right, as a human being, to enjoy certain conditions. He has the right to: (i) Be wanted, and to be born healthy,(ii) Exist in healthy environment and receive continuos loving care,(iii) Have basic needs satisfied,(iv) To acquire necessary intellectual and emotional skills, and to receive care through appropriate agencies that seek to keep children as close as possible to their normal environment.²

Training of mental health leaders as well as courses of psychosocial rehabilitation, focusing on family training and patient education were organized in several countries in 1992.

Neglect of the mental health services by central and local government leads to:(i)Shortage of mental health services,(ii)Lack of knowledge and family competence towards basic principles of mental health,(iii)Dominance of the traditional values and attitudes towards psychological and mental health³.

In Sudan the interest in the field of child mental health started recently. In 1995, the child mental health department was established in Wad Medani pediatric hospital, as the first specialized department in Sudan, providing services to the community in the curative and preventive aspects of child mental health.

This study aims at raising the mothers awareness about the elements of psychological health and development in pre-school children.

The specific objectives of our study include: (i) to assess the awareness of the mothers towards pre-school children psychological development,(ii) to raise the mothers awareness about the different factors influencing childhood development,(iii) to raise the knowledge of the mothers about the features of common psychological disorders at pre-school age.

Methodology:

Area of study and sample:

A1 Nasr area, located at the eastern side of Wad Medani city was chosen to be the study area. The population of this area shares the same characteristics and the same social, health and educational services. One block was selected randomly. It contains about 110 families. The study covered all mothers whose children are at pre-school age at this block (50 mothers).

Phases of study:

I .Base line phase: 50 mothers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire, the contents of which included: (i) the causes of psychological disorders, from the mother's point of view (speech disorders, sleep disorders, phobic disorders, bed wetting, ect),(ii) whether the child is suffering from a disturbed behaviour (stealing, social isolation, thumb sucking, nail biting, ect),(iii) the causes of epileptic fits, from the mothers

point of view,(iv) the mother's knowledge about the appropriate source of help when the child suffers from one of the psychological disorders.

At a later stage, a focus group discussion was arranged. The total number of mothers was divided into three subgroups to assess the mothers' knowledge, attitude and practice, towards preschool children psychological development.

The focus group discussion covered the following areas:(i) factors that influence childhood psychological development,(ii) stages of normal development at pre-school age,(iii) different features of psychological disorders at pre-school age,(iv) methods of handling and prevention of childhood psychological disorders.

2.1.Intervention phase: This phase included; design of a health education intervention programme, orientation of two psychologists about the programme, and in communication skills, so as to assist in the implementation of the programme.

A training manual was developed. It contains guidelines of topics discussed in the programme, including, the different factors influencing childhood development, the features of childhood development and the common psychological disorders at pre-school age, and the means of prevention.

The training of mothers was conducted through: (i) weekly meetings with mothers for two months in Al Naser health center, (ii) home visits: interpersonal communication with mothers was conducted, through weekly home visits, by the researchers (4 visits for every family),(iii) home care cards: containing health education messages, concerning different aspects of child mental health, were distributed to mothers during home visits.

Follow up and supervision: We arrived at the findings and comments during the supervisory home visits (4 visits for every family).

Six months following the intervention phase, evaluation of the programme was carried out through: (i) administration of post questionnaire; the contents of which were similar to those of base line phase, (ii) focus group discussion with mothers; covering areas as those of base line phase.

Data analysis: The data were coded and analyzed. Correlation and chi-square tests were conducted to test the significance of the results of the study.

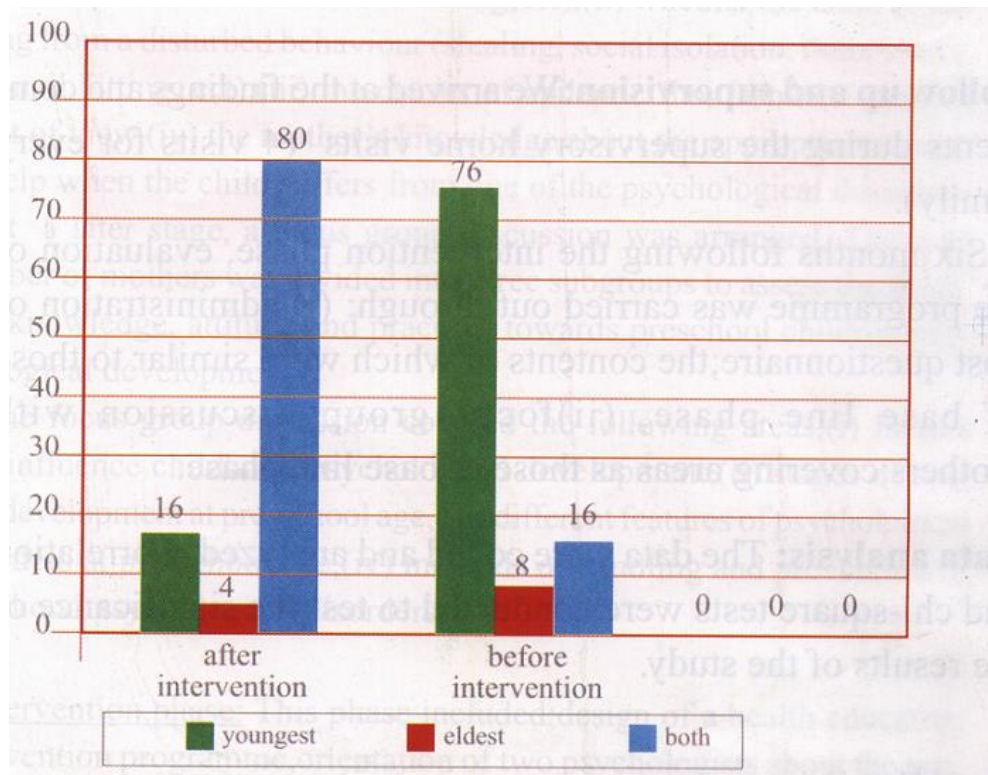
Results:

Fifty mothers were interviewed before and after the delivery of health education intervention programme designed to raise the mother's awareness about child mental health¹

Before the intervention programme:

76 % of mothers thought that, the youngest child needs more care and protection (fig1).46% of the mothers thought that, the boys must be given more attention than girls (fig2).

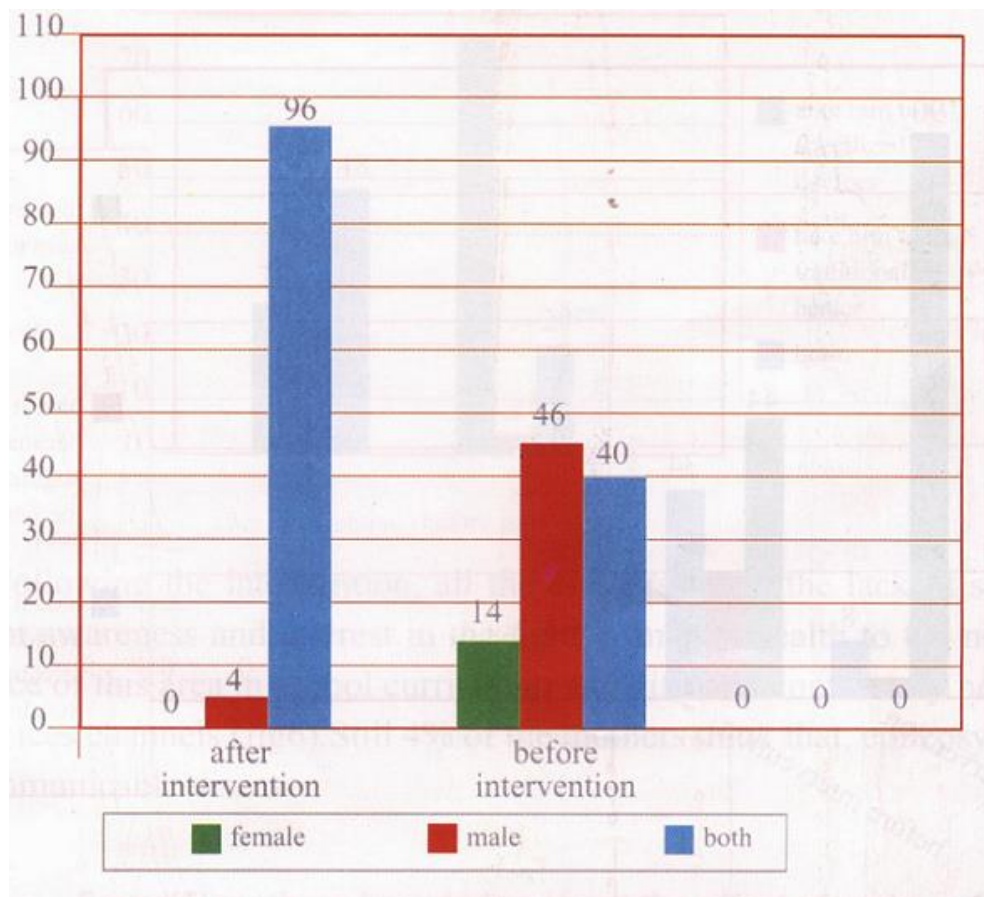
figure(1) mothers point of view towards equal attention being given to children



24% of the mothers preferred to take their children to traditional healers rather than the specialized doctors (fig 4). 48 % of the mothers thought that, early childhood experiences do not affect the child development (fig5).74% of the mothers related the lack of sufficient awareness and interest in the field of mental health to the negligence of this area in school curriculum and different community health services channels (fig6).12% of the mothers thought that, epilepsy is a communicable disease.

Child mental health

figure(2) mothers point of view towards equal care being given to male - female children

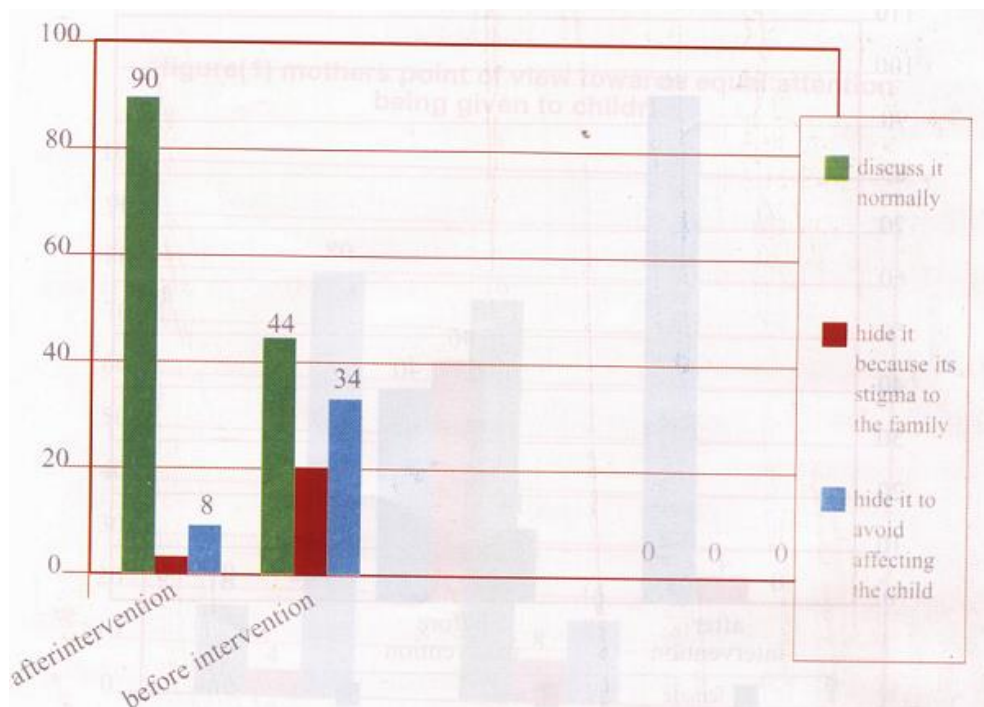


After the intervention programme:

Following the intervention, 80% of the mothers came to know the importance of equal treatment among their children (fig 1).

96% of the mothers came to know the importance of equal care given to male/female children (fig 2).

figure(3) mothers knowledge about their role after receiving specialized consultation for the child.



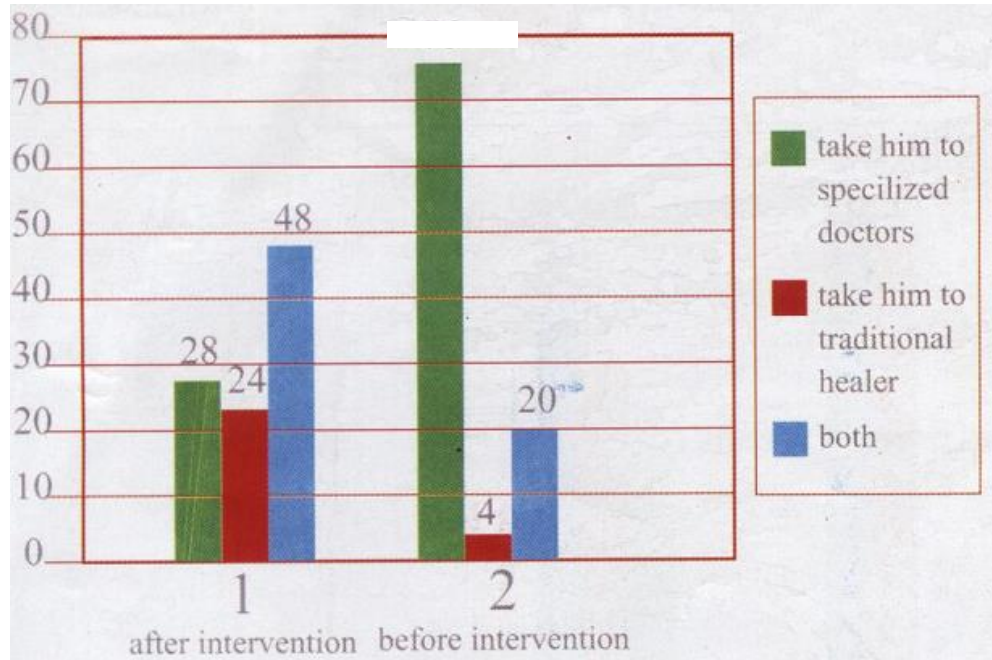
The dominance of traditional value and attitudes clearly appears even among educated mothers. Even after intervention, still 16% of mothers refer child psychological disorders to evil eye and unknown causes.

Following the intervention 90% Of the mothers came to know how they treat their children after receiving specialized consultation (fig3).

After the intervention still 4% of the mothers prefer traditional ways of treatment (fig4).

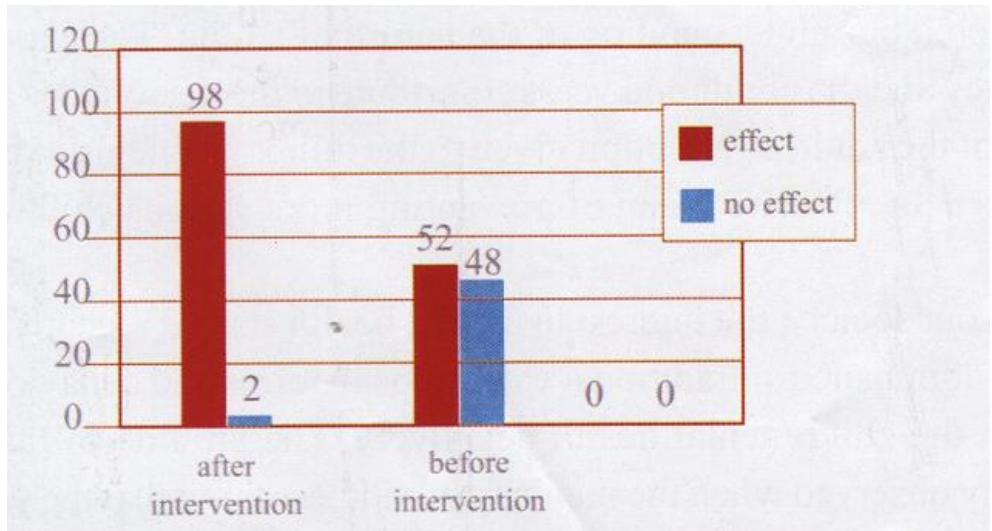
Following the intervention 98% of the mothers came to realize the importance of this period in shaping the Child personality and development (fig 5)

Figure (4) mothers knowledge about the source of help to seek when the child suffer from a psychological disorder

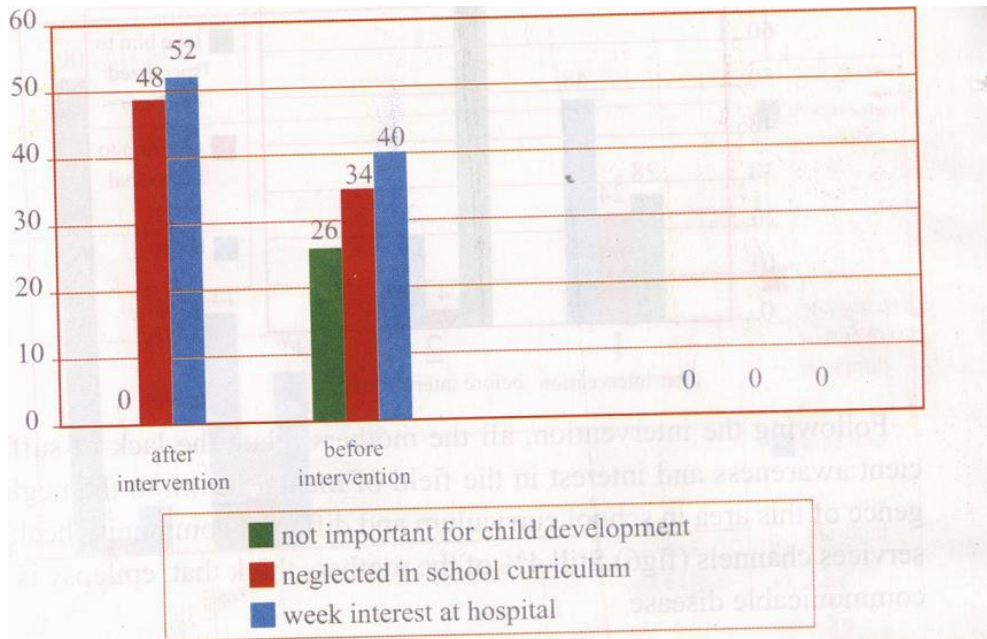


Following the intervention, all the mothers relate the lack of sufficient awareness and interest in the field of mental health to the negligence of this area in school curriculum and different community health services channels (fig6). Still 4% of the mothers think that, epilepsy is a communicable disease.

Figure (5) mothers knowledge about the effect of early childhood experiences in shaping the child personality



figure(6) mothers point of view about the causes of lack of sufficient awareness of child psychological health



Discussion:

The study of child development was considered important because it furthered our understanding of the nature of adults. The experiences of infancy and the childhood years contribute to the personality and behaviour of the adult, so attention given to the minor problems of growing up is often an effective mean of preventing more serious childhood disorders⁵.

In our society, the interest in mental health started recently. We suffer from dominance of traditional values, local norms and behaviours, which affect the child mental health negatively, The attitude of favoritism is clearly observed when the majority of mothers think that the young child must be given more care and protection than his siblings and prefer boys to girls.

When there is favoritism, the un favoured child, in addition to general signs of in security, is likely to be jealous of the brother or sister who is favoured by the parent, the favoured child suffers from over protection³.

Again the dominance of wrong believes is clearly observed when there is a common believe that epilepsy is a transmitted disease, although there is no medical evidence to prove this. This clearly shows that the local culture plays an important role in shaping the individual attitudes and behaviours as Clay³ mentioned culture consist of a system of values, believes, norms, and symbols that have been developed by society and shared by its members.

Although Mussen⁴ mentioned that the preschool age is important because the child mental development is quite well formed by the age of six years, more than 40% of mothers think that the early childhood experiences never affect the child development and the child physical health is more important than psychological health. This is a natural result of negligence and lack of interest in the field of child mental health in our community. In order to raise the community interest ,we should start by the effective target group in the socialization process (mothers) ,so that the change may happen gradually.

Due to the limited duration of this study (one year) the objectives were concerned mainly with raising the mothers awareness in the area of child mental health, in order to help them to become conscious of their children problems.

The results of our study reveal that possible change and interest among mothers may occur concerning the knowledge about child mental health. But the attitudes and practice need a longer duration of time, because it is related to values and believes which were deeply rooted in their psychological makeup over decades. This is supported by Clay³ when he mentioned that culture may persist over long periods of time with relatively little change, but marked changes in the environment lead to change in the culture.

Conclusion:

The programme has achieved its goal in raising the mothers awareness about the different aspects of child mental health. However, change in practices has not been measured because they are related to tradition and believes which need a lot of time, and a multi intervention programme. This programme can be generalized through different channels using social intervention approach by promoting and reinforcing these messages through

community- based interventions including social centres, women societies, school curriculum and mass media.

Recommendations:

(i) To increase the community awareness about different aspects of child mental health, using different channels and mass media,(ii)to establish child mental health department within the Maternal- Child Health services, including child guidance clinics, to provide preventive and curative health services,(iii) to train specialized staff, so as to direct the activities of mental health at different levels in the community and (iv) to include the aspects of child mental health in the school curriculum at different levels.

References:

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