

Analysis of Parental Knowledge Dealing with Aspects of Toddler Parenting

Abstract

Background: Parents play a pivotal role during the toddler years. Effective child-rearing practices during toddlerhood are essential for healthy development, shaping a child's cognitive, emotional and social growth. Research studies indicated that many parents lack crucial knowledge which can hinder their ability to provide optimal care.

Objective: The objective of the present study is to examine the need of parents regarding knowledge on aspects of toddler parenting such as toddler growth aspects; toddler health; toddler nutrition; child care; toddler parenting; day to day parenting; toddler clothing and other products; toddler entertainment and education.

Methodology: The present investigation was carried out in two cities of Haryana state i.e. Hisar and Fatehabad. The four healthcare centers of District Hisar and Fatehabad viz. i) Maharaja Agarsain Medical College (Agroha, Hisar), ii) Satija Health Care centre (Hisar), iii) Shree Balaji children Hospital and Maternity Home (BhattuKalan, Fatehabad) and iv) Jaipur Children Hospital (Fatehabad) were selected purposively. A total of 120 mothers of children aged 2-4 years, who visited the outpatient departments (OPD) of these hospitals, participated in the study. Data was gathered using a self-structured questionnaire.

Findings: The results revealed that most mothers expressed a strong need for information on toddler growth and development, health, nutrition, childcare, parenting, clothing, products, and education.

Conclusion: The study highlights a lack of awareness among women regarding various aspects of toddler parenting. Therefore, there is a clear need for further research to address the knowledge gaps among mothers of toddlers.

Keywords: toddler, need assessment, toddler health, toddler nutrition, toddler clothing

Introduction

A toddler is defined as a young child, typically aged between 12 to 36 months, who is learning or has recently learned to walk (Lieberman, 1993). The term—toddler—is derived from—to toddle which describes the unsteady walking style characteristic of children in this age group. The toddler years are a time of remarkable transformation. From the first tentative steps to the development of language and social skills, toddlers experience a whirlwind of growth and change. During these formative years, children make significant advancements in physical, cognitive, social and emotional domains. Research highlights the importance of the first 1,000 days of life as a critical window for child development (Wachs *et al.*, 2015; Black *et al.*, 2017).

Parents play a pivotal role during the toddler years. Parenting is defined as the process or state of being a parent, encompassing the nurturing, protecting and guiding of a child through their

developmental journey (Brooks, 1991). Fitzgerald (2021) noted that the toddler years, characterized by significant developmental milestones, present some of the greatest challenges for parents. During this critical period, parental involvement is crucial for establishing a strong foundation for future developmental success. The quality of parental interaction directly influences a child's developmental trajectory, with engagement in activities such as reading, playing and talking significantly enhancing language development, cognitive skills and socio-emotional growth (Richter *et al.*, 2017).

Effective child-rearing practices during toddlerhood are essential for healthy development, shaping a child's cognitive, emotional and social growth. Responsive and supportive parenting fosters secure attachments and promotes positive developmental outcomes (Britto *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, inadequate parenting practices can result in behavioral and emotional difficulties (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2009). Therefore, the stakes of parenting during this period are high, impacting not only children and families but also society as a whole (Fox *et al.*, 2010; Easterbrooks *et al.*, 2012).

The extent and quality of parental knowledge are often crucial for enhancing children's development and health. However, research shows that many mothers of toddlers have significant knowledge gaps. Parents frequently face challenges and uncertainties related to child-rearing practices, developmental milestones, nutrition, behavior management and safety.

A major knowledge gap is a lack of awareness about developmental milestones. Studies reveal that many parents are not fully informed about what to expect at various stages of their child's development (Bornstein and Cote, 2004). They often lack understanding of physical, motor, cognitive, social and emotional development (Kumar *et al.*, 2024) and the specific milestones associated with these areas (Aldaye *et al.*, 2020). This lack of awareness can prevent parents from providing the appropriate stimulation and support that are crucial during the toddler years.

Studies have shown that many parents lack knowledge about proper nutrition for toddlers (Bentley *et al.*, 2014). Knowledge of Indian mothers is also inadequate in matters of health aspects (Lobe *et al.*, 1992; Elburet *et al.*, 2015; Ramawat and Goswami, 2018).

Behavioral management is another area where parents often lack knowledge. Toddlers are at a stage where they are developing autonomy and can exhibit challenging behaviors such as tantrums and defiance. Effective strategies for managing these behaviors are crucial for healthy socio-emotional development (Sanders, 2012). However, many parents resort to ineffective or inconsistent discipline methods due to a lack of understanding.

Research showed that many parents are not fully knowledgeable about safety practices, such as childproofing the home and preventing accidents (Schwebel and Gaines, 2007). This knowledge gap can lead to increased risks of injuries and accidents.

Research studies indicated that many parents lack crucial knowledge which can hinder their ability to provide optimal care. These gaps in understanding can significantly impact a child's development. Without sufficient knowledge, parents may struggle to offer the right support and

stimulation, leading to delays in physical, cognitive and socio-emotional growth. Such delays can have lasting effects on academic performance, social relationships and overall well-being (Walker *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to address these knowledge gaps to ensure that all parents have access to accurate and practical information (Sanders *et al.*, 2003).

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in two districts viz. Hisar and Fatehabad of Haryana state due to the easy accessibility of respondents. Four healthcare centers of District Hisar and Fatehabad viz. i) Maharaja Agarsain Medical College (Agroha, Hisar), ii) Satija Health Care centre (Hisar), iii) Shree Balaji children Hospital and Maternity Home (BhattuKalan, Fatehabad) and iv) Jaipur Children Hospital (Fatehabad) were selected purposively. The administrative staff and doctors at these hospitals were approached, and the objectives of the study along with the sample requirements were explained to them. Permission was obtained to contact the parents of children aged 2-4 years who visited the OPD of these hospitals.

Methodology

Sample Selection: The study sample consisted of 120 mothers of children aged 2-4 years, who were personally interviewed using a self-structured questionnaire which was developed based on an analysis of various toddler parenting apps and expert opinions. The selection criteria included mothers who had at least one child within the 2-4 age range and were living in nuclear families (or where no elder family member is living with them in case of the joint family).

These selection criteria adopted for these mothers were as follows:

Mothers with at least one child aged 2-4 years were chosen for the study because they had recent experience with toddler care practices, making it easier for them to recall their experiences. Living in nuclear families (or where no elder family member is living with them in case of joint family): It was necessary to select mothers living in nuclear families (or no elder family member is living with them in case of joint family) to understand the need of those mothers who had no readily available source of relevant and useful information to make their parenting more effective.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were systematically classified and organized into tables to facilitate meaningful analysis aligned with the study's objectives. To interpret the results and derive insightful conclusions, the following descriptive statistical methods were employed:

- Frequency
- Percentage

Results and Discussion

Need for Knowledge on Growth and Development of the Toddler

Under this section growth and development of the toddler were assessed.

Table 1 Need for Knowledge on Growth and Development of the toddler

Table 1: Need for knowledge on growth and development of the toddler N=120

Growth aspects	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Physical development	110	91.67	10	08.33	0	00.00
Motor development	106	88.33	14	11.67	0	00.00
Mental development	116	96.67	04	03.33	0	00.00
Language development	106	88.33	14	11.67	0	00.00
Social development	112	93.33	08	06.67	0	00.00
Emotional development	110	91.67	10	08.33	0	00.00
Self-care skills	108	90.00	12	10.00	0	00.00
Ways to promote various developments	106	88.33	14	11.67	0	00.00

The need for knowledge on the growth and development of the toddler has been displayed in Table 1. The data indicated that a significant majority of women considered information on mental development (96.67%), social development (93.33%) and both physical and emotional development (91.67%) to be very much needed. Furthermore, an equal proportion of respondents (88.33%) felt that knowledge on motor development, language development and ways to promote various developments was also essential. On the other hand a negligible number of women found it somewhat needed for growth and development of toddler. There was not a single mother who did not feel any need of information on these aspects.

Previous studies by Aldayelet *al.* (2020) and Karuppananet *al.* (2020) support this, showing that mothers often lack comprehensive knowledge in key areas of child development. Also, Shewaleet *al.* (2022) found that a large proportion of mothers surveyed had only average knowledge about developmental milestones, indicating a widespread need for more accessible, clear and accurate information.

Need for Knowledge on Toddler Health and Nutrition

Toddler health and nutrition such as toddler health care and toddler nutrition were assessed.

Table 2: Need for knowledge on toddler health care N=120

Health Aspects	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Common cold and cough	109	90.83	11	09.17	0	00.00
Stomach problem	101	84.17	19	15.83	0	00.00
Teeth problem	108	90.00	12	10.00	0	00.00
Vaccination	107	89.17	13	10.83	0	00.00

Child immunity	104	86.67	16	13.33	0	00.00
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Table 3: Need for knowledge on toddler nutrition

N=120

Nutritional aspects	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Bottle feeding	88	73.33	20	16.67	12	10.00
Complementary feeding (6 to 24month)	107	80.83	08	06.67	05	04.17
Diet plan	108	90.00	09	07.50	03	02.50
Tiffin ideas	80	66.67	33	27.50	07	05.83

The need for knowledge on toddler health care has been portrayed in Table 2. According to the results, the majority of respondents expressed a strong need for information on common cold and cough (90.83%), teeth problems (90.0%), vaccination (89.17%), child immunity (86.67%) and stomach problems (84.17%). Notably, there was not a single respondent who indicated that knowledge on any of these health aspects was not needed, highlighting a universal recognition of the importance of health education in these areas.

Research by Al-Ayed (2010) and Samanta (2021) supports this, by showing that many mothers have limited knowledge regarding their children's health. . Other researches have also indicated a lack of knowledge in mothers on health aspects such as diarrhea (Lobe *et al.*, 1992) and teething (Elburet *et al.*, 2015; Purani *et al.*, 2015 and Srinivasa *et al.*, 2018). Further studies by Ramawat and Goswami (2018) and Ali *et al.* (2020) emphasize that a lack of awareness about immunization often leads to incomplete vaccination schedules which can significantly impact the health of toddlers. This highlights a critical gap in maternal knowledge about child health.

The need for knowledge on toddler nutrition has been shown in Table 3. The findings highlighted that the majority of participants expressed a strong need for information on diet plan (90.0%), complementary feeding and weaning (80.83%). On the other hand, two thirds (66.67%) of respondents found information on tiffin ideas to be very much needed while approximately three fourths (73.33%) of women felt a strong need for guidance on bottle feeding. Overall, the findings suggest a strong need for accessible resources and guidance on toddler nutrition to address the identified gaps in knowledge.

These results are in line with the findings of the other research studies which indicate that the majority of mothers had a strong demand for information on various aspects of child nutrition (Samanta *et al.*, 2023). In a study by Berisha *et al.* (2017), it was highlighted that while mothers generally had a good understanding of complementary feeding, there was a gap when it came to applying this knowledge, specifically regarding the timing of introducing complementary foods. This underscores the importance of not just providing knowledge but also ensuring mothers have the right guidance on when and how to implement it in practice.

Likewise, Parikh *et al.* (2019) found that majority of mothers didn't know the correct type of

complimentary feeding to initiate for their babies.

Need for Knowledge of toddler parenting and child Care

Toddler parenting and child care such as daily care of toddler, day-to-day parenting, child clothing and other products and toddler entertainment and education were assessed.

The need for knowledge on toddler parenting and child care has been depicted in Table 4. The data demonstrated that the majority of respondents felt that information on child safety (90.83%), common child care (84.17%) and behavior problems (82.50%) was very much needed. At the same time, nearly three-fourths of the respondents expressed a strong need for information related to child eating habits (78.33%), sleep schedule (77.50%), discipline (77.50%), child screen time (74.17%) and toilet training (70.0%).

For instance, Latha (2022) identified that many mothers are unaware of home safety challenges for young children, underscoring the need for more resources on this topic. Similarly while Qayyum *et al.* (2015) found mothers well-informed on general child care, areas such as discipline and safety remain under-explored, indicating a need for more holistic parenting education. Samanta *et al.* (2023) found that majority parents not had information on child care aspects such common child care, behaviour problems and child safety.

The need for knowledge on day-to-day parenting has been presented in Table 5. The findings indicate a high demand for information on traveling with a toddler, (86.67%), budgeting for child care (84.17%) and pre-school tips (81.67%) among the majority of respondents. Further, nearly three-fourths (77.0%) of the respondents expressed a very strong need for information related to a father's role in child development and parenting myths.

Table 6 provides an analysis of the perceived need for knowledge regarding toddler clothing and other baby products among respondents. As the table shows, the majority of the respondents considered information on baby clothing to be very much needed (85.00%). While nearly three-fourths (77.50%) of respondents felt some need for information on other baby products.

The need for knowledge on toddler entertainment and education has been illustrated in Table 7. The results showed that the majority of respondents felt a strong need for information on poems (79.17%), stories (75.0%). More than two-thirds of the respondents expressed very much need to have information related to toys (67.5%), lullabies (68.33%) and games (70.83%).

This finding aligns with Samanta (2021), who reported that majority of the respondents found it very much needed to have information on baby clothing (88.0%) and other baby products (92.0%). Also found that about an equal number of the respondents found it very much needed and somewhat needed to have information regarding poems (48.0%), toys (48.0%), games (50.0%) and lullaby (46.0%).

Table 4: Need for knowledge on toddler parenting and child care

N=120

Care aspects	Very much needed	Somewhat needed	Not needed
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	F	%	F	%	F	%
Common child care	101	84.17	16	13.33	03	02.50
Child eating habits	94	78.33	24	20.00	02	01.67
Sleep schedule	93	77.50	22	18.33	05	04.17
Toilet training	84	70.00	33	27.50	03	02.50
Child screen time	89	74.17	27	22.50	04	03.33
Child safety	109	90.83	09	07.50	02	01.67
Discipline	93	77.50	25	20.83	02	01.67
Behaviour problems	99	82.50	16	13.33	05	04.17

Table 5: Need for knowledge on day-to-day parenting

N=120

Care aspects	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Traveling with a toddler	104	86.67	07	05.83	09	07.50
Budgeting for child care	101	84.17	12	10.00	07	05.83
Pre-school tips	98	81.67	18	15.00	04	03.33
Father's role in child development	93	77.50	20	16.67	07	05.83
Parenting myths	93	77.50	16	13.33	11	09.17

Table 6: Need for knowledge on toddler clothing and other products

N=120

Products	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Baby clothing	102	85.00	12	10.00	6	05.00
Other baby products	93	77.50	19	15.83	8	06.67

Table 7: Need for information on toddler entertainment and education

N=120

Entertainment and education aspects	Very much needed		Somewhat needed		Not needed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Poems	95	79.17	23	19.17	02	01.67
Stories	90	75.00	29	24.17	01	00.83
Toys	81	67.50	38	31.67	01	00.83
Games	85	70.83	27	22.50	08	06.67
Lullaby	82	68.33	26	21.67	12	10.00

Conclusion

This study was conducted to assess the need of Indian mothers for some of the important aspects of toddler parenting. A self-structured questionnaire was developed to carry out this study. Results of the study concluded that the majority of the mothers felt a strong need for toddler growth aspects; toddler health and nutrition; child care; toddler parenting; toddler clothing and other products; toddler entertainment and education. Other researchers also found a lack of knowledge among women related to these toddler aspects. So, there is a need for further studies to overcome the problem of mothers of toddlers.

Limitations: The number of respondents was small and they belonged to the only two cities of Haryana state. The needs of the women in other parts of the country may vary.

Recommendations: it is recommended that governments, healthcare organizations, and parenting experts should run social media campaigns to raise awareness about toddler parenting. Community centers, healthcare providers, and educational institutions should offer workshops and seminars. User-friendly apps designed to track toddlers' milestones, provide parenting tips, and offer expert advice could significantly enhance parents' knowledge and confidence.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research. No financial or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence the content of this study have been identified.

Declaration: NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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