

## **Family Risk Factors Associated with Aggressive Behavior among Preschool Children in Zagazig City**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Aggressive behavior is one of the most common behavioral issues. The family is a child's central and essential living environment. Also, family has a deep influence on early childhood and there are many family risk factors linked to the development of aggressive behavior in children. **Aim of the study:** This study aimed to assess the family risk factors associated with aggressive behavior among preschool children. **Subjects and Methods:** **Research design:** Cross-sectional descriptive research. **Setting:** This study was carried out at four governmental nursery schools in Zagazig City, Egypt. **Subjects:** The study sample consisted of 365 preschool children and their parents selected randomly by using a stratified multistage sampling technique. **Tools of data collection:** Data was collected by using three tools: **Tool (I):** Demographic data. **Tool (II):** Aggressive behavior scale. **Tool (III):** Family environment scale. **Results:** 58.6% of the preschool children had high level of aggressive behavior, and 62.2% of the preschool children had poor level of family environment. Also, most of children with low level of aggressive behavior (84.0%) had a good family environment. **Conclusion:** Poor family environment has adverse impact on children behavior and increase their aggression. Moreover, parents' age was a negative predictor of aggressive behavior of children, while father education, mother work, residence in rural, family size, and income were positive predictors of aggression among them. **Recommendations:** Behavioral skills training programs to preschool children to prevent aggressive behavior. Health education interventions and counseling sessions focused on parents about behavioral change, appropriate parenting practices, and how to manage aggression of their children.

**Keywords:** Aggressive behavior, Family risk factors, Preschool children.

### **Introduction**

The preschool years are a crucial time in life because it is where many abilities and behaviors are developed. Preschool-related conditions have an impact on the child's immediate development as well as their future growth and well-being (Charach et al.,

2020). Preschool is regarded as laying the foundation for future academic success, social interaction, and emotional development (Gandarillas, Elvira and Rodríguez, 2024). Globally, and particularly in recent years, childhood aggression has become a serious public

health concern. Furthermore, research indicates that among preschool-aged children, aggressive behavior is one of the most common behavioral issues. Aggression in childhood also increases a person's lifetime chance of developing behavioral issues as well as other social and emotional difficulties. Early life events can be related to the difficult levels of aggressive behavior in adolescent, which recognized in preschool period (**Türkoglu, 2019**). Aggressive behaviors have been reported as a clinical problem in approximately 23%-40% of children (**Sturme, 2022**).

The family is a child's central and essential living environment and the most proximal point from which a child's lifestyle is fashioned based on various characteristics. It is vital to emphasize that negative qualities of parental relationships, such as aggression and the prevalence of conflict, negatively affect the children being raised. A high rate of occurrence of these aspects causes the child to have behavioral and emotional problems, comparatively poor academic performance, insecure feelings while around parents, and social problems whereby the child finds it hard to socialize with others, and later in life, this might also manifest in the form of poor relationship success (**Hickey, Hartley and Papp, 2020**).

Aggression in children is thought to be significantly influenced by the views of the parents. Numerous researches indicate that parental views and unsatisfactory or conflictual interactions with parents are linked to aggression (**Pu and Rodriguez, 2021**). Child aggression is often described in conjunction with father-mother aggression. Aggression engagement has also been linked to parental role stress and a range of parental feelings, both

good and negative, toward their children (**Gomes et al., 2022**).

Preschoolers who experience high levels of family conflict are emotionally distressed and may reflect physical animosity through intensified heart activity or rashes (**Navarro et al., 2022**). Also, Parent-child relationship considerably affects young children. This is because the bond between a child and their parents is the most significant and first relationship in their lives. The bond between a kid and their parents influences how the child sees the world, other people, and themselves. To help their children grow up to be content and well-adjusted adults, parents must continue to love and care for them (**Altalib, AbuSulayman and Altalib, 2024**).

The socioeconomic level of the family has a big influence on parenting style, which can affect how the kids behave. Children from lower-income homes are more likely than those from higher-income families to display behavioral issues, according to studies. This is probably caused by several things, such as stress and trauma exposure, a lack of opportunities and resources, restricted access to high-quality education (**Yesil Kodak and Guzel, 2024**).

Since family risk factors are linked to the development of aggressive behavior in children, working with parents to enhance their parenting techniques has long been a tradition. Usually, parent education courses are given in small groups. Fantastic Years Training for Parents is one program with a substantial body of research. This program is special because it teaches parents how to establish positive relationships with their children, how to employ positive disciplining techniques, and how to support their learning and accomplishments using written materials

and videotapes (Abu Al Rub, 2018). One of the most important roles parents may play is encouraging and bringing about behavioral improvements in their kids. By using behavioral modification techniques such as reinforcement, parents can motivate their children directly. They can also indirectly motivate their children by providing a secure, helpful, and encouraging environment (Zifan and Sijie, 2022).

### **Significance of the study**

The influence of early childhood families is profound. Children from loving, supportive families do better in school and life than those without. They express higher self-esteem, better social skills, and career success. Furthermore, positive family relationships and effective communication between parents and children have been associated with reduced social difficulties and aggressive behaviors (Ziv and Arbel, 2021). Based on this perspective, it is evident that families matter when considered based on their effect on children. Children who grow up in homes with violence, abuse, or neglect are more likely to be aggressive. Whereas it is not possible to completely prevent all aggression in children, there are things that families can do to reduce the risk. These include creating a loving and nurturing home environment, teaching children how to resolve conflicts peacefully, and providing positive role models (Lin, 2023).

Community health nurses play a critical role for the prevention, early detection, and management of aggressive behavioral problems in children. Also, it may help children and their parents in several ways, such as recognizing a particular problem by proper background and detecting responsible causal factors that may contribute to aggressive

behavior, consult with parents to discover effective solutions to behavior problems and provide counseling intervention, and encouraging parents and teachers to improve the environment at home, school and community (Gustafsson, 2019).

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to assess the family risk factors associated with aggressive behavior among preschool children

### **Research questions**

- What is the prevalence of aggressive behavior among preschool children?
- What is the effect of the family socio-demographic characteristics on aggressive behavior of preschool children?
- Is there an association between the family environment and aggressive behavior of preschool children?

### **Subjects and methods**

#### **Research design**

A cross-sectional descriptive research design was used to carry out this study.

#### **Study setting**

The study was conducted in four governmental nursery schools in Zagazig city. These were namely Abdel-Lateef Hassanein, modern teachers experiment, Om-Elmomenien, and Sheba nursery schools. These were randomly selected from two educational directorates (East and West) available in Zagazig city.

#### **Study subjects**

A stratified multi-stage sample was selected from four governmental nursery schools in Zagazig city (n= 365). Represented by a random selection of 91 children from each nursery. based on the next criteria:

- The age of children extended from (3 - < 6) years.
- At least one parent with the child (mother or father).
- Sex: males and females.
- Free from any physical/mental disabilities.

### **Tools of data collection**

Three tools were used to collect necessary data.

**Tool I: Demographic data** It consists of three parts as follows:

**Part I:** Personal data of the studied sample as; child's age, sex, residence, ranking (4 items).

**Part II:** Family data as; parents' age, educational level, and job (6 items).

**Part III:** Socio-economic data as; family members, family income, media, number of rooms, physical environment (as water, sewage disposed, ...etc) and crowding index (5 items).

### **Tool II: Aggressive Behavior Scale.**

This tool was developed by **Amayreh and AbdElkariem (1991)** which is adopted by The American Association Scale for Adoptive Behavior. It includes 27 items and measures the grade of aggression. It deals with the following domains (Physical aggression, Verbal aggression, and Aggression toward property).

### **Scoring system**

Aggressive behavior scale rest on summing up the score of all scale items. Aggressive behavior scale used close-ended questions and response choices ranged from 'never' (2), 'sometimes' (1) and 'always' (0). Total grade = 54 point, the scale recognized 3 focal scores:

- Low aggression (13.5).
- Moderate aggression (>13.5-18.8).
- High aggression (>18.8-27).

### **Tool III: Family Environment Scale**

The scale adopted from **Moos and Moos (1994)** to measure the family environment as it is real or current situation of family. The scale consisted of 90 items covered three dimensions they are: I. Relationship, II. Personal Growth, and III. System Maintenance dimension. These dimensions divided into 10 subscales are (Cohesion, Expressiveness, conflict, Control, Organization, Independence, Active-Recreational Orientation, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, and Moral-Religious Orientation).

### **Scoring system**

Family environment scale rest on adding up the score of all scale items. The potential range for the scale items is 75%. The family environment scale used close-ended questions and response choices ranged from right (1), and wrong (2). Total grade =180 points, the scale identified two main scores:

- Good family environment: ( $\geq 75\%$ ).
- Poor family environment: ( $< 75\%$ ).

### **Content validity and reliability**

The tool was revised by a panel of 3 experts from the department of community health medicine, and community health nursing, who conducted content validity of all the items of the tool for relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness and understandability. All recommended modifications were made. The reliability of the following parts of the tool was tested through measuring its internal consistency by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Reliability proved to be satisfactory as shown by the values of

Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Tool II: Reliability for aggressive behavior scale is (0.962). Tool III: Reliability for family environment is (0.817).

### **Field work**

After securing the official approvals for conducting the study, the researcher visited the selected nursery schools and met with each director of the four nurseries to explain the aim of the study and data collection procedure then, the researcher asked the directors to seek the permission of the parents of the selected children to participate in the study. The researcher met about 20-30 parents each time. The researcher ongoing by presenting herself to parents, who were grateful that data obtained is severely private. When parents' consents were protected verbally, the researcher asked parents to fill in the questionnaire. The time needed to fill out the tools ranged from 20-30 minutes. researcher stayed with the parents to answer any specific questions that arose during completing the data. The researcher checked it for their completeness. The researcher went to the selected nurseries 4 days per week from 8 AM to 1 PM. The period of data gathering took 2 months and started from the start of October 2024 to the end of November 2024.

### **Pilot study**

A pilot study was carried out on 10% of the calculated total sample size to assess comprehensibility and correctness of the tools, the setup of the questionnaire, understanding of the items, and to estimate the suitable time needed for filling in the questionnaire sheet. No modification was recommended, so the members involved in the trial study were included in the main study sample.

### **Administration and ethical consideration**

First, the study proposal was accepted through the Zagazig University Faculty of Nursing's Post Graduate Committee and Research Ethics Committee (REC) with the code of M.D.ZU.NUR/180/9/5/2023.

Agreement for involvement was reserved from participants after full clarification of the aim of the study, as well as its measures. They were assumed the opportunity to refuse involvement, and they were informed that they can take out at any phase if they want without giving any reasons. As well they were confident that the information given would remain private and would be used for the research purposes one. Official letters were issued from the dean of the faculty of nursing, Zagazig university to the Directorate of Education in Sharqia, then official letters sent to East and West educational administration, then letters sent to headmaster of the nursery to get their permission to conduct the study. The purpose of the study and its procedures was explained to them to get their agreement and cooperation. The researcher gave the headmaster of each nursery a copy of the formal letters. Then meetings and discussions were held between the researcher and the participants to obtain the data necessary to conduct the study.

### **Statistical analysis**

All data were collected, tabulated and statistically analyzed using SPSS 20.0 for windows. Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated to assess relationship between study variables, best fitting multiple linear regression was also used to predict factors which affect total scores of knowledges, related factors and adverse outcomes. Cronbach alpha



coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the scales through their internal consistency.

## Results

**Table 1**, clarifies that, 75.6% of the studied children were female, and the mean age of them was  $4.26 \pm 0.81$ . Additionally, 92.6 % of the studied children were from urban origin, Furthermore, 46.0 % of them ranked first birth order.

**Table (2)** The mean age of the children's fathers was  $35.36 \pm 3.91$  years and 73.4% of them had University and more education, While, 43.3% of them were Employees. on the other hand, the mean age of the children's mothers was  $31.50 \pm 3.87$  years, 64.4 % of them had University and more education, and, 52.6% of them were working. Additionally, 50.4% of family's member were 3-4 persons, and 67.7% of families had enough income. While the majority 90.7% of all studied sample had social media.

**Figure (1)** clears that; more than half of the studied preschool children (58.6%) had high level of aggressive behavior. Also, 27.7% of them had moderate level, and 13.7% of them had low level of aggressive behavior.

**Figure (2)** clears that; more than towthirds of the studied preschool children (62.2%) had poor level of family environment. While, 37.8%) of them had a good level.

**Table (3)** indicates that, 70.1% of the children with high levels of aggressive behavior had poor family environment, while children with low level of aggressive behavior 84.0% had good family environment. And these differences were statistically highly significant ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table (4)** shows that, parents' age and work were negative interpreters of aggressive behavior among the preschool children. Meanwhile, residence, number of family members and income were positive interpreters of aggressive behavior among them ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## Discussion

Childhood aggression, especially in recent years, is a major health problem around the world. children's behavior and emotional problems has been the focus of research at home and abroad, and its main externalized behavioral problems such as aggressive behavior (Miller and Jacobson, 2023).

Concerning the prevalence of aggressive behavior among the study sample, the existing study results exposed that more than half of the considered children had high aggression. This may be due to preschool children considered by strong motion and credited to exacting over-controlling parenting styles or lack of parental warmth and positive reassurance during the preschool years. At the same line with a study conducted by Aziz and Elsayedouda (2017) in Egypt presented that more than half of children had aggression. Also, this was supported by Shokry, Mohamed and Hashem (2023) in Egypt about externalizing behavioral problem of early childhood specified that more than half of children had high aggression. Also, a study conducted by Salavera et al. (2024) in Spain designated that more than half of children anguish from aggression.

On the other hand, Abdalla, Eldakhakhany and Mohamed (2018) in Egypt found that one fifth of children suffered from aggression. And, in a study conducted by Navitha et al. (2019) in India reported that quarter of children had moderate level of hostile and aggressive

problems. Also, a study by **Salimi et al. (2019)** in Iran demonstrated that less than quarter of children suffered from aggression. It may be due to differences in the economic status or environment surrounding of the children.

**Concerning the family environment among the study sample,** the current study results clarified that nearly two thirds of preschool children had poor family environment. This might be due to difficulty in forming healthy relationships between family members, if a child grows up in an environment of conflict and poor cohesion this effect on his behavior. and financial hardship can also lead to instable home environment. This study results are supported by **Nikolaidis et al. (2018)** in Greece who reported that two third of children exposed to violence and had poor family relationship.

**Concerning the relation between aggressive behavior and family demographic characteristics among the study sample,** the study results demonstrated that parent's age had a negative effect on child's aggressive behavior. The results of the existing study discovered that the aggressive score level remains high in children whose father's age is between thirty-five to less than forty years. This might be due to inappropriate parenting disciplinary strategies. This study is agreed with **Sánchez and Romero (2021)** in Granada, Spain showed that parents styles was inappropriate among young parents.

According to the results of the current study revealed that mother's work had a positive association with child's aggressive behavior. findings of this study revealed that the aggressive score level was moderate in children whose mothers were working. This might be due

to work stress and working hours might affect the amount of time and emotional energy she can devote to her child. This study is supported by **Japar (2016)** a study conducted in Indonesia indicated that parenting pattern and jobs affect children's aggressive behavior. Also, a study conducted by **Walther and Pilarz (2024)** in USA showed that parental employment hours are associated with child behaviors through parenting practices.

According to the results of the current study, number of family members had a positive association with child's aggressive behavior. All the studied sample from families of 3 to 4 individuals had mild aggressive behavior. This might be due to children in small families may resort to mild aggression to seek attention, especially if they feel overshadowed by a sibling or neglected due to busy parents. These results were in the sameline with a study done by **Kokanović, Opić, and Sisak (2018)** in Croatia who, indicated positive association between the number of family member and the perpetration of preschool aggression.

In the bright of the existing study, the results displayed that family income had a positive effect on a child's aggressive behavior. Three quarters of preschool children had aggression with sufficient family income. This might be due to children may have greater access to technology (violent video games, unmonitored internet) that increase consequences for bad behavior, and parents may work long hours or travel frequently, leaving their children in the care of others and lack of supervision can lead to less guidance and more behavioral issues. The study results were supported by **Ward and Lee (2020)** in Ann Arbor showed that family socioeconomic status

effect on child's social behaviors and aggression.

On the contrary, a study conducted by **Baker et al. (2020)** in USA showed that low family socioeconomic status is associated with higher relational aggression in children. This might relate to economic hardship can lead to increased conflict between parents due to financial pressure. And limited access to recreational activities which children may be more prone to aggressive behavior.

**Concerning the relation between family environment and aggressive behavior**, the current study showed that there was a statistically significant relation between family environment and child's aggressive behavior. Most of the study sample with low level of aggressive behavior had good family environment. This might be related to healthy family was characterized by warmth and emotional support in which children who feel loved and supported by their parents are more likely to develop emotional regulation skills, which reduce aggression.

And these goes at the sameline with a study conducted by **Jia et al. (2016)** in China and clarified that there is a significant relation between family environment and child's behavior. Similarly, a study conducted by **Baker et al. (2020)** in USA found that different family environmental factors increase the risk of developing aggressive behavior in preschool setting, and there is the relationship between the family variables and aggression in preschool children. Also, a study conducted by **Lone and Albotuaiba (2022)** in Saudi Arabia show that good family environment characterized by cohesion, expressiveness and low family conflict is

related to lower child aggressive behavior.

The current study results demonstrated that, residence of preschool children were statistically significant positive predictors of aggressive behavior, the most of children from urban origin had aggression. This might relate to urban areas with their diversity, might have varying cultural influences that shape children's behavior, high population density, social disorganization and lack of interaction with other children, and exposure to violence in urban environments have been associated with increased aggression among children. This result supported by the study of **Mouratidou et al. (2020)** in Germany, who demonstrated that children who live in urban areas are more aggressive than children in rural areas. Also, a study conducted by **Mambra and Kotian (2023)** in India indicated that children in urban areas may experience higher levels of aggression compared to their counterparts in rural or semi-urban areas.

On the contrary, a study conducted by **Joarder and Roshni (2021)** in India showed that rural residents show higher levels of aggression compared to urban residents. This might be due to culture differences between urban and rural areas. And economic hardships may contribute to frustration and tension, leading to aggressive behavior.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that aggressive behavior is a common behavioral problem among children, more than half of the preschool children displayed high aggressive behavior. Also, poor family environment has an adverse impact on children's behavior and



increase their aggression. Moreover, parents' age, and mother work were negative predictors of aggressive behavior of children, while father education, residence in rural, family size, and income were positive predictors of aggression among them.

### Recommendations

**Based on findings, the study recommended:**

- Behavioral skills training programs to preschool children to prevent aggressive behavior.
- Health education interventions and counseling sessions focused on parents about behavioral change, appropriate parenting practices, and how to manage aggression of their children.
- Further research studies concerning the topic of preschoolers' aggression in Egypt to explore the other risk factors.

### Authors' contributions

S.A.A; contributed to providing the scientific background, tools organization and conceptualization of objectives for the research. M.M.A; collaborated in conceptualizing the research ideas and objectives as well as devising the research plan. S.A.H; contributed to organizing the research. E.A.M; contributed to data collection and analysis, formulating research recommendations and compiling the reference list.

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### Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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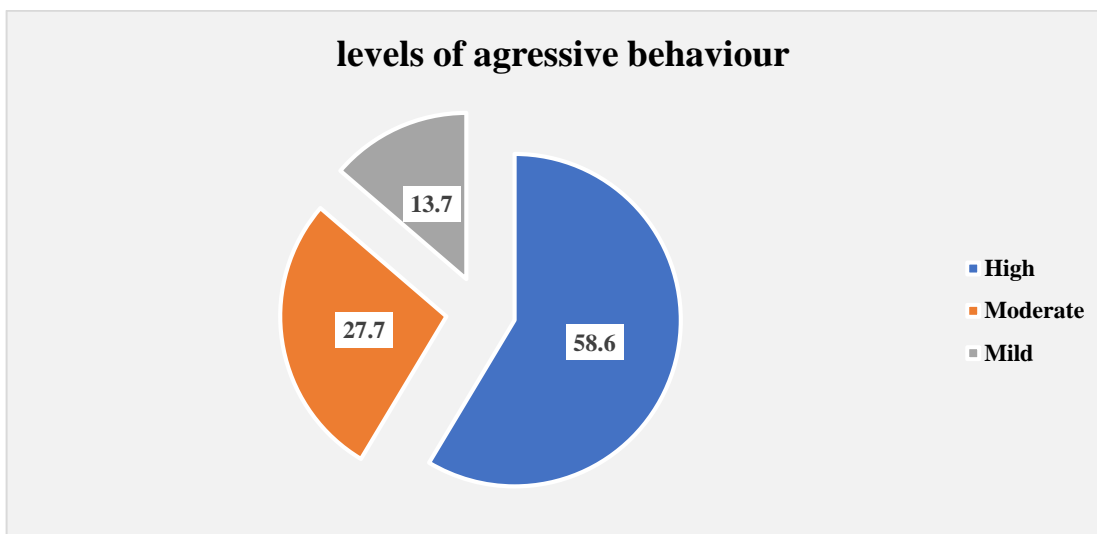
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**Table (1): Distribution of studied pre-school children by their personal characteristics (n=365).**

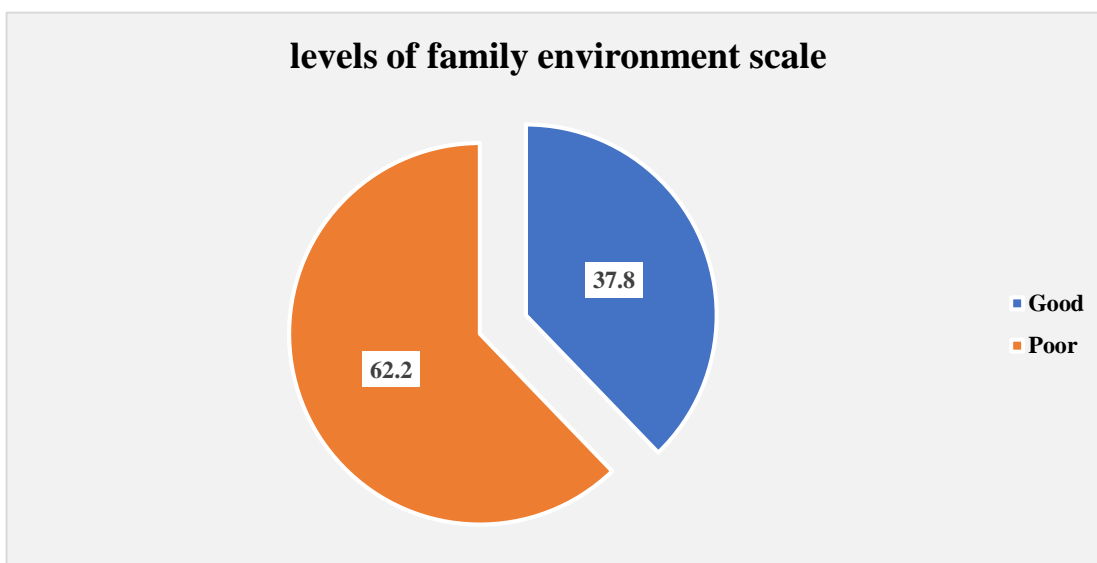
Personal characteristics	No.	%
<b>Child sex</b>		
Male	89	24.4
Female	276	75.6
<b>Age</b>		
3 yrs	62	17.0
4 yrs	168	46.0
5 and more	135	37.0
<b>Mean <math>\pm</math>SD</b>	<b>4.26<math>\pm</math>0.81years</b>	
<b>Ranking</b>		
First	168	46.0
Second	79	21.6
Third	118	32.3

**Table (2): Distribution of studied preschool children by their family sociodemographic data (n=365).**

Sociodemographic data (n = 365).		
Family data	No.	%
Father age		
<30	50	13.7
30-<35	44	12.1
35-<40	229	62.7
40+	42	11.5
Mean $\pm$ SD	35.36 $\pm$ 3.91	
Father education		
Secondary education	97	26.6
University and more	268	73.4
Job		
Employee	158	43.3
Professional	91	24.9
Free worker	116	31.8
Mother age		
<30	120	32.9
30-<35	117	32.1
35+	128	35.1
Mean $\pm$ SD	31.50 $\pm$ 3.87	
Mother education		
Primary education	16	4.4
Secondary education	114	31.2
University and more	235	64.4
Job		
Working	174	47.4
Not working	192	52.6
Family member		
3-4	184	50.4
5-6	181	49.6
Income		
Sufficient	247	67.7
Insufficient	89	24.4
Sufficient and save	29	7.9
Media		
Yes	331	90.7
No	34	9.3
Residence		
Rural	27	7.4
Urban	338	92.6



**Figure (1):** Percentage distribution of studied preschool children by their total aggressive behavior level (n=365)



**Figure (2):** Percentage distribution of studied pre-school children by levels of family environment scale (n=365)

**Table (3): Relationship between family environment and aggressive behavior among preschool children (n=365).**

Total family environment	Total aggressive behavior							X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	Low (n=50)		Moderate (n=101)		High (n=214)				
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%			
▪ Poor	8	16.0	69	68.3	150	70.1	52.66	.000**	
▪ Good	42	84.0	32	31.7	64	29.9			

**Table (4): linear regression between family characteristics and total aggressive behavior (n=365).**

child and family characteristics	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize d Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	82.784	8.926		9.275	.000
Residence	30.417	2.462	.632	12.356	.000**
Father age	-1.385	.205	-.430	-6.756	.000**
Education	-1.227	1.573	-.043	-.780	.436
Job	.709	.368	.056	1.927	.055
Mother age	-.954	.221	-.293	-4.324	.000**
Education	.447	1.184	.020	.378	.706
Job	.7.945	1.225	.342	.6.488	.000**
Family member number	11.250	.725	.850	15.528	.000**
Income	2.008	.816	.101	2.462	.014*

*Dependent Variable: total aggressive behavior score*

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