

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Enabling young children to achieve their full developmental potential is a requisite for sustainable development, but globally 43% of children are still at risk to do so. The problem is grave among the under-privileged rural population in India.

**Objectives:** Early Childhood Development (ECD) is influenced by multiple factors. As the prevalence of risk factors varies in different communities, strategy planning for nurturing care will also depend on evidence-based identification of specific threats to ECD.

**Method:** Cross-sectional observational study through random sample survey of 609 households with children 0-6 years conducted in a rural district in India to identify the major threats prevalent in the study area.

**Results:** Lack of stimulatory home environment, poor learning opportunities and inadequate responsive parental care were major hindrances. Most factors are strongly influenced by poor maternal education.

**Conclusion:** Promotion of maternal education and empowerment of primary care-givers at grass-root level will help overcome many of the adverse factors.

## CONTACT

Dr Nandita Chattopadhyay  
Udbhaas Child Development Centre  
Email: udbhaas@gmail.com  
Phone: +919674905780  
Website: www.udbhaas.com

## INTRODUCTION

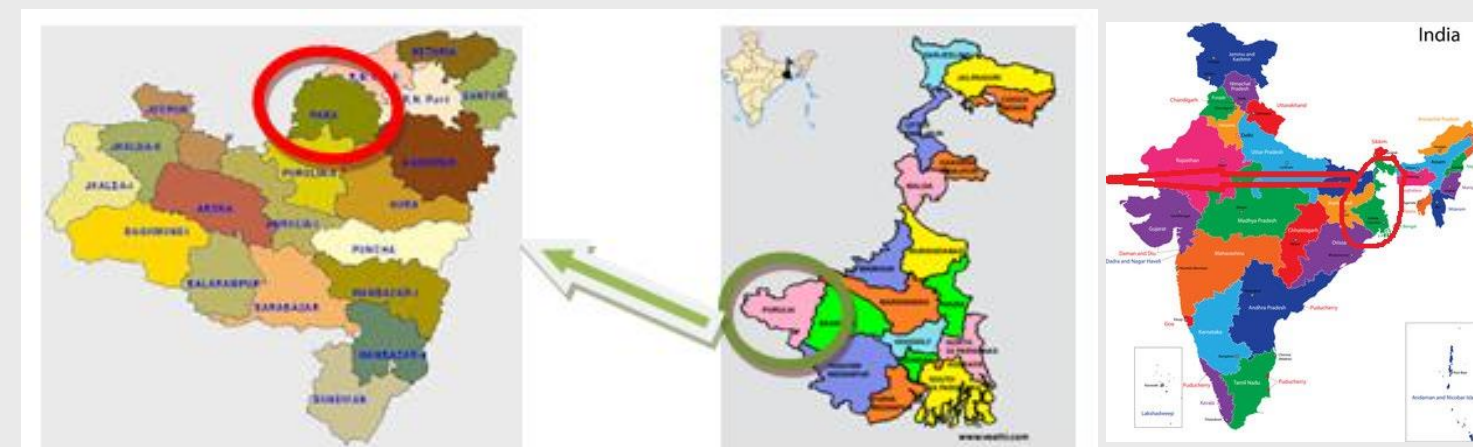
Enabling young children to achieve their full developmental potential is a requisite for sustainable development, but globally 43% of children are still at risk to do so. Optimum Early Childhood Development (ECD) is hindered by various risk factors, the prevalence of which varies in different communities. Strategy planning for nurturing care depends on evidence-based identification of specific threats to ECD.

This study aims to identify major threats in a marginalized rural community in India.

## METHODS

Cross-sectional observational study through random sample survey of 609 households with children 0-6 years was conducted in a rural district of West Bengal, India, using a MICS III based questionnaire, focusing on the key threats to ECD. The data was analyzed to identify the major threats prevalent in the study area.

### The Location



### The Milieu



Authors have no conflict of interest to declare

## RESULTS

### Demographic profile reveals:

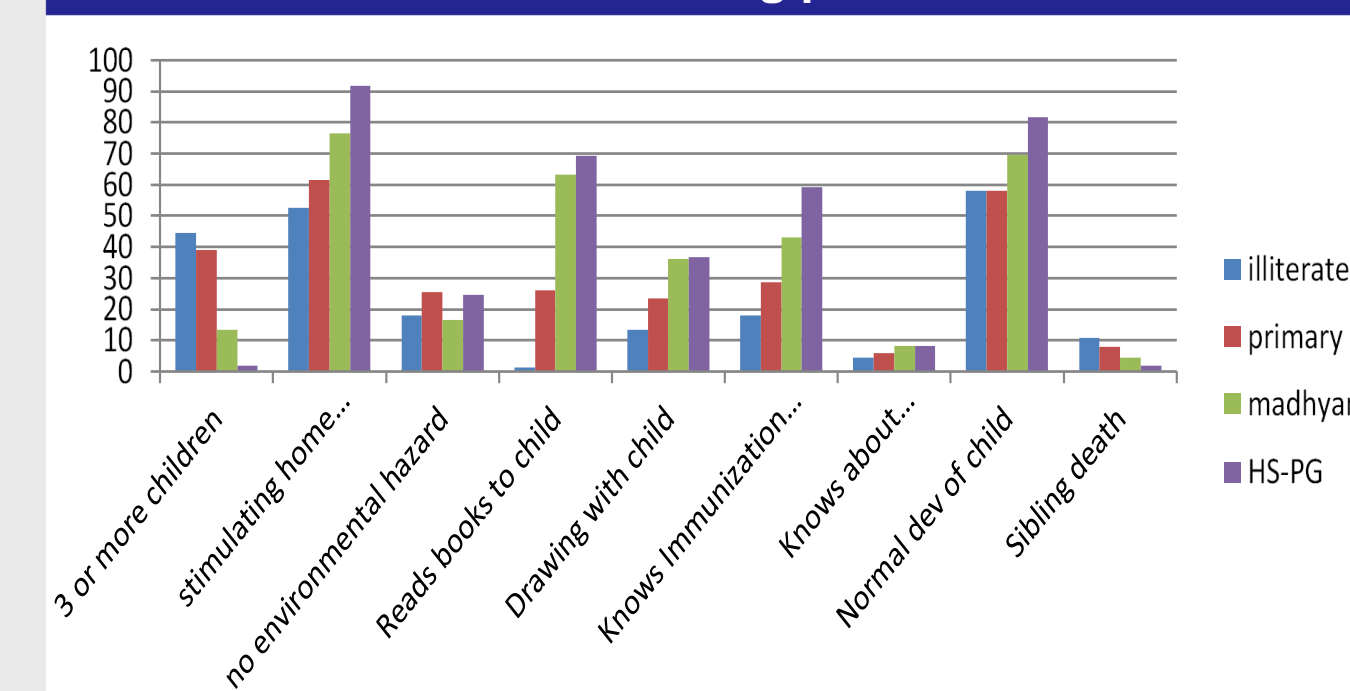
Poverty, over-crowding and poor living conditions with small, poorly ventilated and ill-lit rooms are prevalent detrimental factors for ECD.

### Maternal education

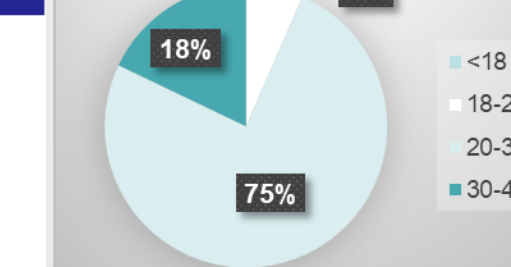
Female literacy rate is only 37.15%.

Maternal education influences many of the risk-factors for ECD.

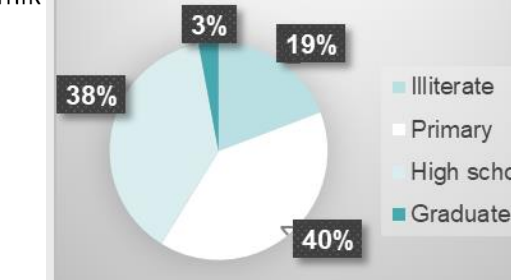
### Effect of maternal educational level on child rearing practices



### Maternal Age



### Maternal Education



### Detrimental factors detected

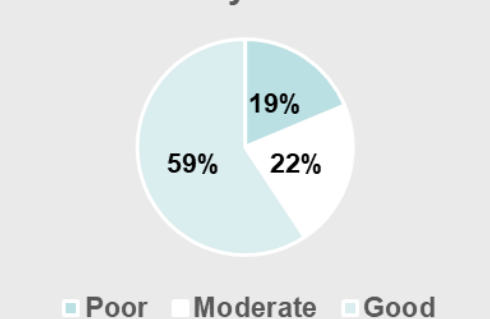
### Health and Nutrition

23.7% babies were low birth weight  
58.5% children exclusively breast-fed till six months  
34.7% delayed & inadequate complementary feeds  
Most children were used to open-air defaecation  
Hand-washing practices were inadequate.

### Early Learning Opportunity

Resources for early stimulation (toys, swing/hammock, wall-hanging pictures and calendars, mirrors, clocks) available but poorly utilized.

### Stimulatory Environment



Level1: mild Level2: moderate, Level 3: highly unsafe

### Home safety

Hazardous factors: High cots, Easy access to stove, fire, sharp objects, plastic bags, easy access to ponds, roads; inadequate fencing, Exposure to tobacco, pesticides, hay stacks within the house.

### safety level



## DISCUSSION

This socio-cultural background of adversities had an impact on development of young children; 36.4% were late in achieving some milestones, mostly cognitive skills, possibly due to lack of proper stimulating environment and nurturing care.

**Poor stimulating home environment** and **poor maternal education** were identified as most significant contributing factors to poor ECD. The cumulative effect of multiple factors was detrimental to brain development and the single determinant that influenced many of them was maternal education.k



## CONCLUSIONS

Promotion of maternal education and empowerment of primary care-givers at grass-root level will help overcome many of the adverse factors. Awareness generation among parents by duly trained field level workers through regular home visits need to be considered.

## REFERENCES

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