

# A Study Of Mental Retardation Amongst Children In The Context Of Their Socio – Economic Background

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## Abstract

*In a pluralistic society, which has a variety of variations across caste, creed, linguistic differences, and others; there is one dimension of life which is governed by the order of the nature – unlike the earlier stated parameters of differences – majority of which are created by the human being – and that is, the challenges in the form of physical and mental disabilities or limitedness. A child born with some developmental disorder faces certain degree of challenges in his entire life and it affects not only his or her own life but also the lives of people around him. India has a very large number of disabled persons. Mentally retarded children constitute a significant proportion of disabled population in our country. In about one-third of all cases, the cause of mental retardation is not known and as a result their diagnosis and possible treatment are not catered to. If the retardation problem is identified in the beginning or some efforts in the direction of preventing it to affect the future generation is made at the right time, the end result would certainly be of a great help for the society.*

*This paper delineates findings of a study which was carried out to investigate the effect of socio-economic status on mental retardation. The objectives of the study were to study the socio economic background of the mentally-retarded children and to find out the factors responsible for the mental retardation. The sample of the study was 80 mentally-retarded children selected randomly of a couple of special schools located in Gautam Buddh Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh. It was found that mental retardation is more prominent among males than females. The prevalence of mental retardation was found more among Backward Castes specially with low income group families. While probing the causes for mental retardation it was revealed through the present study that early marriage of women resulted in producing more children with mental retardation. The findings of the study may guide the social scientists, educationists and stakeholders of inclusive education*

**Keywords:** Mental Retardation, Socio-economic status, hearing impairment, speech impairment, stunting.

## Introduction

‘Disability’ is a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. The term is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease. Mental handicap is a condition characterized by subnormal intellectual ability and arrested or delayed development. The terms ‘mental retardation’, ‘mental deficiency’, ‘mental handicap’ and ‘mental subnormality’ refer to the same condition. Person with less than average mental ability or intelligence are called ‘mentally retarded’.

A child with mental handicap finds it difficult to learn, to use past experience for solution of current problems, to remember, understand and adjust to various situations. Mental handicap may or may not be accompanied by concurrent physical disability epilepsy or speech defects. Mental handicap is not curable by use of medicines. If the causative factor is iodine deficiency, metabolic disorder or blood group incompatibility, prompt action may help but, facilities for timely detection and intervention

are either inadequate or non-existent even in metropolitan cities.

Mental retardation can occur in any family and cuts across the lines of racial, ethnic, educational, social and economic backgrounds. An estimated 6.2 to 7.5 millions people have mental retardation in India-that is about 3 percent of our total population.

## Need Of The Study

As is witnessed in our daily life, the disability of a child makes the whole family challenged in many aspects of life. In our country, the substantial proportion of population with some or the other kind of disorder poses a challenge to the entire nation, which needs to be addressed properly and adequately.

If the quality of life of a person with disabilities can be improved, by way of rehabilitation, s/he can be totally integrated into the society. Hence, to prevent the children from with disabilities, particularly mental retardation, the causes for it have to be identified; thereby the problem of mental handicap would be solved to an extent. The present study is a modest attempt conducted among children who suffer from mental retardation.



## Objectives of the Study

The present study on mental retardation in a special school was carried out with the following objectives:

- To examine the pattern of mental retardation found among the children.
- To explore the factors responsible for the mental retardation of children.
- To study the socio economic background of the mentally-retarded children.

## Methodology

It was a survey based investigation carried out by interviewing the parents of Mentally Retarded children. The sample constituted 80 mentally-retarded children and their parents. A structured interview schedule was prepared for the mentally-retarded children's parents and the schedule consisted of questions regarding socioeconomic background of mentally-retarded children, parental lifestyle, the circumstances that led to the birth of child with mental retardation, and parental perception towards the school for the mentally-retarded children.

The data was collected by interviewing the parent of the children constituting the sample by the investigator herself after getting the information and cooperation from the school administration. The data so collected were analyzed and interpreted by applying descriptive statistical techniques like percentage, proportion and average.

## Finding of the Study

### Socio-economic background of the Mentally-Retarded children:

- The sex-wise distribution of mentally-retarded children accommodated in the school reveals that of the total, two-thirds (66.4%) of them were males whereas females' proportion in the total is (33.6%) one-third. This shows that mental retardation was more among males than females.
- Approximately three-fourths (70.5%) of the mentally retarded children belonged to backward castes while the rest were Scheduled Castes (22.5%) and 7% others. It evidences that the prevalence of mental retardation was found more among background castes in the study area.
- In the light of the educational background of the children's parents, a large majority of them (parents) were literates (68%) followed by illiterates (32%). It proves that birth to children with mental retardation is more among educationally poor in the society. As far as parental occupation of such children was concerned, three-fourths (76%) of them were daily wage followed by farmers (14%), weavers (5.6%) and others 4.4%. The study revealed that poor income group was more vulnerable to birth of child with mental retardation.

## Factors responsible for the mental retardation

- It was observed that in most of the cases early marriage of women resulted in child with mental retardation. It was found that while mother's Mean age at the time of marriage was 18.5 years, 23.5 years was father's age.
- 70% parents gave birth within one years of their marriage while it was after two years for another 30 percent of the parents.
- The study revealed that the mentally-retarded children in the study area were born after an average of one years of their parental marriage and the mother's mean age at birth of child with mental retardation was 19.5. Large majority 82.5 % of the mentally-retarded children were born at hospital of which 80 percent were normal.
- The study showed that low birth weight caused mental retardation in children. Their average weight at birth was 2.0 kg. More than three fourth (78.5%) of the parents noticed their child's disability while they were at an average age of 2.1 year.
- It is important to note that a large majority (80%) of the mentally-retarded children was not affected by any diseases after birth; three-fourth (72.5%) of their ancestors were not affected by any disability; and almost all (95%) their family members were also free from mental retardation, according to the parents. It indicated that even though the parents were free from disease or disability they gave birth to mentally-retarded children which proves that the mental retardation was not determined during pregnancy.

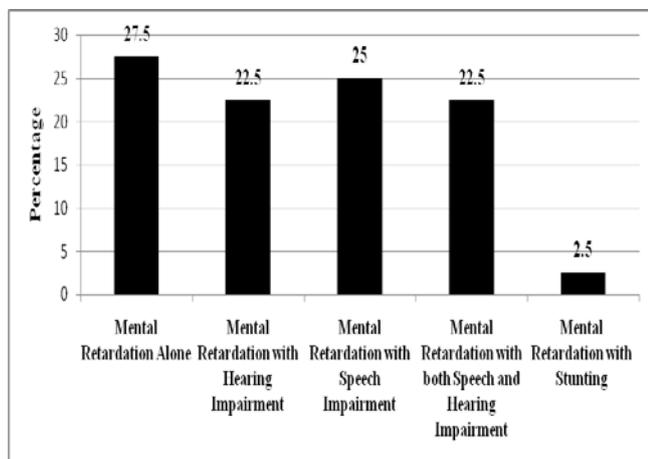
## Mental Retardation Pattern of the Surveyed Children

Table No. 1: Mental Retardation Pattern of the Surveyed Children

S. No.	Pattern of Mental Retardation	Percentage
1.	Mental Retardation Alone	27.5
2.	Mental Retardation with Hearing Impairment	22.5
3.	Mental Retardation with Speech Impairment	25.0
4.	Mental Retardation with both Speech and Hearing Impairment	22.5
5.	Mental Retardation with Stunting	2.5



**Mental Retardation Pattern of the Surveyed Children**



**Figure – 1:** Mental Retardation Pattern of the Surveyed Children

The Table 1 and Figure 1 revealed a pattern of mental retardation among children. As shown above the pattern is as follows; mental retardation alone (27.5%); mental retardation with hearing impairment (22.5%); mental retardation with speech impairment (25%); mental retardation with both speech and hearing impairment (22.5%); and mental retardation with stunting (2.5%).

**Table-2: Mean for some selected variables for Mentally Retarded Children**

S. No.	Variable	Mean (N=40)
1.	Age of Mentally Retarded Children	9.4
2.	Parental Monthly Income (in Rs.)	4500
3.	Household Size	5
4.	Mother’s Age during Marriage	18.5
5.	Fathers Age during Marriage	23.5
6.	Mother’s Age during Child Birth	19.5
7.	Born of first child after Marriage (in years)	1.2
8.	Children Weight at Birth (kg)	2.0
9.	Children’s Age while Disability Noticed	2.1

**Conclusion**

The outcomes of the study suggest that the socio-economic backgrounds of the children with mental disorder have a significant bearing on the status and conditions of their retardation. The study revealed that parents with low level of educational and economical back-

ground tend to have more children with such disability, because of certain degree of awareness missing from their decision making patterns in their lives. The gender was another determining factor when it came to the impact the disability, as it was found that the mental retardation was more prevalent among male children than female children. The social background also emerged as a crucial factor in having an impact of well being of the children. The study contends that despite the national level awareness towards the disability, specially mental retardation, still a major section of our population is affected by such problem due to lack of information, awareness and necessary social support system in place. If we want to see our future generation free from such diseases, we need to have a clear roadmap and honest intention to execute such strategies. Only then the dream of a better future can be realized by our next generation.

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