

# BACKGROUND AND BEHAVIOUR OF TEN CHILDREN IN THE SMILE-PROGRAMME

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22 May 2024

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## 1 CONTEXT OF THE MICRO RESEARCH

The research focuses on children that attend the Mission Education Programme of Smile Foundation at IPER. One of the aims of Smile Foundation is to empower underprivileged children through relevant education (Smile Foundation, n.d. About us). The children of the programme come from at least twenty different local and governmentally aided schools, and get support for learning, a daily meal, and health check-ups (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research, n.d. Projects on Education). The classes are organised from Monday to Friday, from 11AM to 4PM. The children live in local slums.

The aim is to understand the children and their situation better, so that IPER is able to support them better. Understanding the children's background and situation can help to take their unique needs into account and evaluate the need for special interventions. It can help to determine what kind of methods and tools to use when working and interacting with the children, and when planning content or activities.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives are the following:

- 1) Finding out about the children's background and situation, including the chosen physical, social, emotional and psychological aspects.
- 2) Observing the children's behaviour, and social and emotional competences.
- 3) Considering how the children's behaviour might relate to their background.

## 3 TARGET GROUP

The target group consists of ten children who attend the Smile Foundation -programme at IPER. All children were not included, so that there would be enough time for observation and to find out about each child's background. The children in the target group were chosen both randomly and based on how much background information was already available. We also tried to choose the kind of children who attend the lessons somewhat regularly. The target group consists mostly of younger children who belong to classes 1 to 4, so that I could organise activities that suit most of them and work with many of them at the same time. All except one child (Rishab) in the target group are girls, because most of the students in the class and in the younger age group are girls. All or most of the children live below poverty line, which is defined in India by certain variables, such as the type of

residence, land ownership, education, and consumer products, among others (Alkire & Seth, 2013, pp. 419-420).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Collectable data / variables

Because it was the wish of IPER that I took many aspects of the children's situation into account, including physical, emotional, psychological and social, I found it clearer to separate the needed data into two categories: the children's background, and behaviour and social / emotional skills. I made my choices by combining the wishes of IPER with certain frameworks. There are multiple frameworks or theories that could have been used as guidance to determine the attributes that I could have focused on in this research, but due to a limited time, I decided to focus on some basic ones.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) define three essential qualities for a child's well-being, regarding relationships and environments: *safety, stability and nurturing*. They prevent adverse experiences like child abuse and neglect, and can be combined with Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

- *Safe*: A child's physical needs get met, including needs related to food, clothing, sleep, and shelter. There is no physical or emotional abuse.
- *Stable*: The caregivers are consistent, engaged and responsive, and create routines.
- *Nurturing*: A child's interests and emotions are taken into account, and adaptive responses are taught.

According to American Academy of Pediatrics (2020, p. 38), sources of adverse childhood experiences include "physical, sexual or emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, parental mental illness or substance abuse, separation or divorce, intimate partner violence, and neighbourhood violence and crime". Life-long risk factors for mental disorders arise from "genetic background, physical or mental problems of the child or family, deficiencies in psychosocial and educational environment, and exposure to harmful substances, toxins, violence, abuse, or neglect" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020, p. 23). Based on these, I decided to focus on the following areas:

*Physical:*

- The child's neighbourhood and living conditions.
- Signs or experiences of physical neglect or abuse.
- Difficulties related to birth and development.

*Social, psychological and emotional:*

- Relationship quality between the caregiver(s) and the child.
- Signs or experiences of emotional neglect or abuse.
- Parental mental illness, substance abuse, divorce, or intimate partner violence.
- Overall or general mood of the child (e.g. how often the child seems to feel down or happy).

The collected basic information of the children included the following:

- Date of birth, age, class, the school the child is attending, family structure, parents' occupation, and likings.

Concerning the children's behaviour, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has identified five core competences that help children improve their attitudes and behaviours, experience reduced emotional stress, and achieve better academic performances (CASEL's SEL Framework, 2020). They include:

- *Self-awareness*: Ability to identify one's own emotions, strengths and limitations, and to have self-confidence and self-efficacy.
- *Social awareness*: Ability to empathise, understand different perspectives, respect others and appreciate diversity.
- *Relationship skills*: Ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships, listen and communicate effectively, cooperate and negotiate with others, and seek and offer help.
- *Self-management*: Ability to control impulses and stress, motivate and discipline oneself, set goals and be organised.
- *Responsible decision-making*: Ability to identify, analyse and reflect situations from ethical perspective and solve problems accordingly.

Based on the wishes of IPER, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected, and because of the scale of this research, only the data that was possible to get via the chosen

methods and timeframe (and despite the language gap) was collected. This means that there is more detailed information about certain children compared to others, and information about certain attributes is limited. This is also related to the fact that the children, parents, teachers, and other sources of information were not pressured to answer any questions or take part in the research.

## 4.2 Methods

The chosen methods for data collection included observing the children during the lessons, interviewing them individually, doing group activities with them, interviewing the parents, visiting some of the children's homes, and collecting available data via ready-made reports. Basic information about the children was acquired mostly via ready-made reports. Data about the children's behaviour and social and emotional skills was collected mainly by observing them during the lessons. The children and the size of the groups that I worked with varied. I used charts to take notes about their behaviour, and the children were also given a chance to improve their behaviour by explaining them what was expected from them. Teachers' comments about the children were also taken into account.

Individual interviews with the children were done with the help of an interpreter, and the questions were created based on the social, emotional and psychological aspects that I wanted to find about. The aim was to keep most of the questions open-ended, as simple and neutral as possible, and also limit their amount. The questions were modified based on the situation and answers of the child, which means I did not follow the list below meticulously.

An example of the start of an interview with a child:

- How are you doing? (Did you enjoy the lunch? / Did you have a nice morning / lesson? I like your shirt, etc.)
- I would like to ask a few questions from you, is that okay? As you know, I'm helping the teachers here, and we would like to know how are all the children here doing. That is because we would like to support them.
- You can answer the questions based on how you feel. There are no right or wrong answers.

Questions for the children:

- What is your favourite way to spend the weekend?
- Do you have siblings? What do you think about them? / How do you feel around them?
- What about your mother, how do you feel around your mother?
- How do you feel around your father?
- When was the last time you did something fun with your mother or father? How often do you spend time with them?
- How do you spend your time? Do you have time for hobbies and play?
- Do you have friends?
- How do you usually feel at home?
- How do you feel in general / most of the time?
- Are your parents happy around each other? Are your parents fighting a lot with each other?
- Does your mother or father ever get angry at you? What do they do when they get angry?
- We are done / ready! How did you feel about these questions?
- Is there anything you would still like to talk about? We are here to support you.

Information from the parents (most of them were mothers) was also collected via separate individual interviews and with the help of an interpreter. The goal was to take the chosen social, emotional and psychological aspects into account when choosing the questions.

An example of the start of an interview with a parent:

- (Introducing myself): I'm studying social work and doing my practical training at IPER.
- I was given a task to find out more about the children, so that IPER could support them and their families better.
- I aim to write a short report about the children's situation and give it to the head of IPER.
- I have a few questions related to the child and her family, and if you don't feel comfortable answering some or any of the questions, it's okay. Answering the questions is voluntary. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them.

Questions for the parents:

- How is your relationship with the child?
- How is the child's relationship with her father?
- Has there been any difficulties related to the child's birth or development?
- What do you think about the child's overall wellbeing?
- How is your own wellbeing? / How are you feeling yourself?
- Do you have someone who could support your family in times of need?
- How do you spend time with your child? How often?
- How is your child behaving in your opinion?
- How do you discipline your child? What do you do to help her to behave the way you wish her to behave?
- Are there any (other) challenges in your family that might affect the child?
- Does anyone in the family misuse alcohol or drugs?

Possible additional questions related to the child's physical needs:

- At what time does your child go to bed and wake up?
- How often does your child brush her teeth?
- How often and what does your child usually eat?

I also tried to collect data via some simple activities, but the language gap brought its limitations, and only some of the children from the target group were able to take part to them. The first activity was about mapping the people who the children felt safe with. The children were asked to trace around their hand onto a paper, think of people they feel safe with, and write their name (or draw their picture) in each finger and the thumb. I gave ideas by asking 'Who could you go to if you were feeling unsafe or needed help?' and gave family members, neighbours, friends' parents, and teachers as an example. Another activity was about drawing a simple map of their own neighbourhood and including things in it that they considered important, such as home, school, routes, shops etc. After that, the aim was to mark safe and unsafe places to the map with green and red colour, in order to find out about child-friendly spaces and discuss about why certain places feel unsafe or safe.

Data about the children's neighbourhood and living conditions was collected via field visits, but some information about the children's living conditions was also found from the ready-made reports. With the parents' permission we decided to visit the homes of three children who were living close to IPER. Attention was paid to how much space there was in the

house, how many people shared the same space, what appliances were available, and to the level of safety and hygiene, among other things.

## 5 IMPLEMENTATIONS

The timing of different steps or tasks is given in the timetable below.

Content / task	(Due) date
The idea for the research was given by IPER.	13.3.
Discussing more about data collection and the wishes of IPER.	20.3.
Doing background research and defining the data to be collected.	13.-24.3.
Choosing and planning the methods and questions for interviews.	13.3.-1.4.
Observing the children's behaviour and social / emotional skills.	13.3.-19.5.
Implementing the chosen activities with the children.	26.3.-2.4.
Interviewing the children.	9.4. Shrabouni, Rishab, Samaira, Nehat, Shreya, and Aliya. 12.4. Dipika. 16.4. Sultana and Roshni. 15.5. Nasrin.
Interviewing the parents / teachers.	2.4. Mothers of Dipika and Shrabouni. 4.4. Mothers of Nasrin and Nehat. 5.4. Mothers of Sultana, Rishab and Samaira, and grandmother of Aliya. 16.4. Father of Shreya and mother of Roshni.
Field visits.	6.5. Visiting the homes of Sultana, Samaira, and Rishab.
Writing most of chapters 1, 2 and 3.	14.-24.3.
Writing most of chapter 4.	14.3.-7.4.
Writing most of chapters 5 and 6.	1.4.-5.5.
Writing most of chapters 7 and 8.	6.5.-19.5.
Finishing the report.	22.5.2024

Interviews with the children usually took place in the afternoon after the lessons. Other children were asked to exit the room, and everyone was given a small reward after answering the questions. It was possible to answer some of the questions with pictures of emoticons, in case it was awkward for the child to maintain eye contact, and also to help them consider different options. To comment the children's answers, I tried to use affirmations, reflective listening, summary reflections, and encouragement. Because children's social and emotional skills are still developing, I tried to take the limitations of their age into consideration when observing them during the lessons. To find out about the social-emotional development and milestones of different age groups, I used the AAP Healthy Development and Well-Child Support Chart (American Academy of Pediatrics, (2020).

In the activity of mapping safe networks, only three children in the group were from the target group (Roshni, Nehat and Samaira). I wanted to ask questions about the drawings during the activity, but it was challenging because of the language gap. I would have wanted to know, for example, why some children didn't include their parents in their drawing, or had difficulties deciding who could be safe people in their lives. All children wrote the name of some teacher and friend (or just "teacher" and "friend", without specifying the name). The friend was usually someone from the same class at IPER. Both Samaira and Roshni were able to fill out the drawing with 5 safe people, Nehat came up with two. The other activity (mapping the neighbourhood and choosing safe and unsafe places) did not work out as I thought it would, because it was a bit too challenging for the children to draw a map with many locations, so most of them only drew their own house. The students were also copying each other. This happened despite giving instructions via translator for both activities, and showing examples of similar drawings.

Interviews with the caretakers took place in the afternoon, and there was often no time for the additional questions, which is why I left them out. I ended up not asking about intimate partner violence, but it seems that some caretakers would not have minded if I had asked them about it. The field visits were done within one day, and four homes were visited: Samaira's, Rishab's, Sultana's, and one home of an unknown family whose child had come or was still coming to IPER.

## 6 FINDINGS

Because of the large amount of data, it is first presented in table form. The individual descriptions after the tables contain also additional information and are more descriptive. For confidentiality reasons the last names of the children have been left out.

## 6.1 Basic information about the children

Name	DOB, age and class	School	Family structure	Parents' occupation	Likings
Aliya	11 y., class IV (DOB not available).	Tollygunge Girls' High School	Lives with her grandparents. Younger brother lives with Aliya's parents.	Grandmother: domestic helper.	Loves dancing.
Dipika	5.9.2015, 8 y., class II	Tollygunge Girls' High School	Parents, younger brother.	Father: security guard, Mother: domestic helper.	Playing cricket, potato chips, drawing, wants to become a police.
Nasrin	30.11.2014, 9 y., class III	Rajendra Shikha Sadan	Parents, older sister, aunt.	Father: daily labourer (Paris work), Mother: housewife.	Bangla, English, badminton.
Nehat	20.11.2013, 10 y., class V	Rajendra Shikha Sadan	Parents, older sister and younger brother.	Father: Sweeper at KMC, Mother: domestic helper.	Likes rice, fish, and chicken. Would like to become a traffic police, likes English.
Rishab	13.9.2017, 6 y., class I.	Rajendra Shikha Sadan	Parents. Samaira is his cousin.	Father: electrician, Mother: housewife.	Partaking in performances, dancing, using her mother's phone.
Roshni	7.1.2016, 8 y., class II	Jadavpur Boys School	Mother, no siblings. Mother's parents live nearby and visit them often	Father: unemployed, Mother: domestic helper.	Reading books, Bengali language, biryani, playing in a park near her house, wants to become a teacher.
Samaira	16.6.2018, 5 y., pre-primary	Jodhpur Park Girls' High School	Parents, joint family. Rishab is her cousin.	Father: mechanic, Mother: housewife.	Dressing up, watching TV, playing with her dolls, drawing, wearing nail polish.
Shrabou ni	7 y., pre-primary, dropped out of class I (DOB not available).	Data not available.	Parents, younger sister. Mother passed away after the interview.	Mother: domestic helper.	
Shreya	16.10.2015, 8 y., class II	Tollygunge Girls' High School	Parents, grandmother, no siblings.	Father: 100 days worker at KMC, Mother: vegetable vender.	Likes all subjects, favourite foods are mutton, rice and pasta.
Sultana	5.10.2014, 9 y., class IV	Rajendra Shikha Sadan	Aunt, father, and grandfather. Other relatives such as cousins live nearby.	Father works in a bookstore.	Drawing, painting, eating chicken.

Table 1. Basic information about the target group.

## 6.2 The chosen physical, social, emotional and psychological aspects

Name	Neighbourhood / living conditions	Signs of physical neglect or abuse	Difficulties related to birth and development
Aliya	Data not available.	No.	No.
Dipika	Brick built, tally roof single room. Common / public toilet outside.	Mother beats her with a spatula as a mean of discipline.	Dipika was born healthy, but used to get sick often till the age of 5. Mother said Dipika is unable to copy things at school and has difficulties following content.
Nasrin	Brick built, tally roof single room. Common / public toilet outside.	No.	No.
Nehat	A small house with one fan.	Mother slaps her to discipline her.	No.
Rishab	One ~4 m <sup>2</sup> room with one bed for 2 people (Rishab usually sleeps at Samaira's place). Bed is not long enough for sleeping straight. Extra bed above which is usually not used. Kitchen under the main bed. A fan, fridge and TV. Common / public toilet outside.	Mother slaps him to discipline him.	No.
Roshni	Lives in a rented room with her mother.	No.	No.
Samaira	2 beds with a fan for 5 people. The other bed is above the other, hazardous ladders. Downstairs is ~15 m <sup>2</sup> and includes a kitchen. AC, fridge and TV. Common / public toilet outside.	No.	No.
Shrabouni	Data not available.	Gets beaten by both parents as a form of discipline.	No.
Shreya	Brick built, tally roof single room. Common / public toilet outside.	Mother beats her as a mean of discipline.	Shreya was underweight when she was born, but has caught up.
Sultana	2 bedrooms for 4 people (about 9 m <sup>2</sup> each) with a fan. Kitchen and toilet outside. No fridge. The family owns about 400 sq ft (37 m <sup>2</sup> ) of space.	Aunt and father sometimes beat her to discipline her.	No.

Table 2. Physical environment, safety and development.

Name	Relationship quality between the caregiver(s), and the child	Signs of emotional neglect or abuse	Parental mental illness, substance abuse, divorce, or intimate partner violence	Overall or general mood of the child
Aliya	Good.	No.	No, except that her grandma has pressure to raise her well.	Good.
Dipika	Distant with her father. Mother seems stressed,	Has quite little freetime /a lot of	Mother seems stressed. Parents fight a lot, mother	Unclear / incoherent data. Probably could

	which can affect the relationship.	pressure to study.	might beat the father if he has used money on lottery.	be better.
Nasrin	Good.	No.	No substance abuse.	
Nehat	Mother is fed up, so apparently the relationship could be better.  Safe people according to Nehat: teacher and friend (Tanbi).	Parents and children don't have time for each other.	Mother is fed up with the children and sleep-deprived.	Apparently good.
Rishab	Apparently good, but according to his mother Rishab is rude.	Apparently no.	According to the mother, everyone uses some drugs in the family.	Seems ok, but said he feels sleepy.
Roshni	Very good with her mother, not close with her father.  Safe people according to Roshni: Lokkhi (teacher), Reshma, Irfan, Rashi and Mohima.	No.	Father is an addict, but the mother and landlord don't allow him to stay in their room.	Good, seems to cope well with her situation. Did not want to talk about his father.
Samaira	Good.  Safe people according to Samaira: friend (Zoya), mother (Samira), teacher, brother (Rishab) and sister.	No, but Samaira said they could do more something fun together as a family.	No.	Good.
Shrabouni	Doesn't seem very stable because of the mother's mental health.	Doesn't have much time to spend with her parents.	Both parents use alcohol, mother is depressed. Father doesn't support his family. Mother took her own life after the interview.	Has come to school crying, but tries to look happy. It is difficult to interpret the overall mood, but there are reasons to be worried.
Shreya	Unclear / incoherent data.	According to one teacher, Shreya doesn't get enough attention at home.	Father did not admit anything.	Good, but wants attention.
Sultana	Good with her aunt, not very good with her parents.	Father's behaviour can be unstable because of alcoholism.	Mother has run away with Sultana's brother, father is an alcoholic.	Good, but there are also straining / burdening factors.

Table 3. The chosen social, emotional and psychological topics.

## 6.3 Behaviour and social / emotional skills of the children

Name	<b>Self-awareness:</b> Ability to identify one's own emotions, strengths and limitations, and have self-confidence and self-efficacy.	<b>Social awareness:</b> Ability to empathise, understand different perspectives, respect others and appreciate diversity.	<b>Relationship skills:</b> Ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships, listen and communicate effectively, cooperate and negotiate with others, and seek and offer help.	<b>Self-management:</b> Ability to control impulses and stress, motivate and discipline oneself, set goals and be organised.	<b>Responsible decision-making:</b> Ability to identify, analyse and reflect situations from ethical perspective and solve problems accordingly.
Aliya	4-5	3-4	4	3	3-4
Dipika	3	4	3	3-4	3-4
Nasrin	4-5	4-5	4-5	5	5
Nehat	3-4	3-4	3-4	4	3-4
Rishab	4	2-3	2-3	2	2-3
Roshni	4	5	5	5	5
Samaira	4	4	4-5	5	4-5
Shrabouni	3	3	2-3	3	3
Shreya	4	2-3	2-3	2	2
Sultana	4	3-4	4	3	3-4

Table 4. Approximate of behaviour and social / emotional skills on a scale 1-5 (1= lowest, 5= highest level of skills).

## 6.4 Descriptions of individual children

### 6.4.1 Aliya

Aliya's father's relatives were disappointed that Aliya was a girl, so they didn't want her and told Aliya's mother to give her to her mother, which is why Aliya is being raised by her grandma. Her parents would like to have her back, but her grandma wants to keep raising her. Aliya meets her parents very often and has a good relationship with them, but does not know about the backstory. Aliya's mother supports her financially, but there are still financial challenges. The grandma has a good relationship with Aliya. Aliya feels good generally, but said that sometimes her grandparents give more money to her brother.

Aliya is lively, energetic and outgoing. She usually seems happy and confident, and is not afraid to stand up for herself or others. Because of how outgoing and energetic she is, she sometimes has trouble focusing on her own work instead of what other students are doing, and might end up chatting with them, helping others and doing their work for them. She is able to effectively express herself. Overall, she seems social, very active and enthusiastic.

### 6.4.2 Dipika

Dipika feels good around her mother and is closer to her than to her father, who only has an earning role. Dipika's relationship with her father is good but distant. Sometimes she plays outside with him, and she is more obedient to him than to her mother. Dipika feels good around her younger brother, who is two years old. There is no substance misuse in the family. During the interview Dipika told that her parents are happy with each other but also fight a lot, and yesterday her mother hit her husband with a spatula on his leg because he had played lottery.

Dipika goes to school at 6:30AM and is free after 6:30PM, but thinks she has enough free time. The mother is a domestic worker, but also goes home to cook for her family. She said she is doing well, but it seems there's a lot of pressure and she doesn't have anyone to get help from. She spends time with Dipika whenever she's free.

According to the mother, Dipika used to get sick very often till the age of 5. She says Dipika doesn't want to study and cries if it's expected from her. She also said that Dipika doesn't like to make friends, doesn't have friends, and is unable to copy things at school, has difficulties following content, and gets bullied. She said Dipika needs a lot of attention, has anger issues, and is stubborn. The mother beats her with a spatula sometimes. Dipika herself said that her mother doesn't get angry with her, and that she has friends. She said she feels happy at home.

Dipika is a very quiet girl who seems to enjoy calm environments. Because of how quiet and reserved she is, she is usually not taking part to class discussions unless asked to, and might not express her wishes or needs to others unless she thinks it is worth it. She doesn't have a problem listening, waiting for her turn or following teachers' orders.

### 6.4.3 Nasrin

According to the mother, Nasrin has a normal relationship with her parents and is doing well. The family aims to give a good education for her, and the mother is able to spend time with her because she is a housewife and the father provides for them. The mother feels fine except for the heat, and might be able to get support from some relatives for a few days if needed. If Nasrin misbehaves, she tries to counsel or explain things to her; she

doesn't beat her, but might shout. Nasrin said she feels good at home, around her parents, and in general.

Nasrin was absent for a long time due to some good reason, which is why I had a chance to work with her only a few times. Nasrin is a calm and confident child who seems to be able to treat others with respect. She has no problem following orders. She might be slightly reserved around people who are not close to her. She seems like she is content or on a good mood most of the time.

#### 6.4.4 Nehat

According to Nehat and her mother, Nehat's relationship with her parents is good. Nehat said she feels happy at home and in general. However, the mother said that the siblings are always fighting and she is fed up with them. She works as a domestic helper and said she is sleep-deprived. The house is very small, there is just one fan inside, and the weather is too hot. The mother is not very involved in the children's life because the children are so busy that they don't have time to spend together. Whenever Nehat fights with her older sister, the mother slaps them. The father uses dip tobacco. Nehat's younger brother was adopted to the family because her grandmother wanted that.

Nehat seems like a down-to-earth kind of child who is realistic and unpretentious. She seems to appreciate common sense and practicality. She is not openly very outgoing, but doesn't seem very shy or timid either. She doesn't have a problem following orders or managing her emotions, but she could possibly be more confident. There has been times when she simply seems tired, which could also impact her behaviour.

#### 6.4.5 Rishab

Rishab has a good relationship with her parents and spends time with them whenever he is free. He is closer to his mother, who said she gets enough support from other people and is doing ok. According to Rishab, his parents are happy around each other, he feels happy at home and most of the time he feels sleepy. He has no siblings, Samaira is his cousin.

The mother said Rishab behaves in a stubborn way, but is good in studies. After studying he uses his mother's phone. She said he is moody and rude. Rishab doesn't want to study

with her mother and calls her with her first name (disrespectful). Sometimes the mother shouts at him or slaps him. Everyone uses some drugs in the family, sometimes someone is intoxicated in the family (I assumed the mother is referring to adults only).

Rishab has been described as naughty by the teachers. He seems like a brisk and confident child with a sense of humour. He is also quite expressive. It seems that he has a lot of energy and the classrooms or lessons do not always provide an outlet for that. He seems to enjoy active participation in acting or performances. I did not get the impression that he would necessarily deliberately not follow the orders of teachers, but I think he has some restlessness and possibly difficulties to focus on the same topic for a long time.

#### 6.4.6 Roshni

Roshni has a good relationship with her mother. Her father doesn't live with them because he is an alcoholic. He has been to rehab but it hasn't helped. He doesn't have a very good relationship with Roshni. and doesn't meet her. Roshni is doing well with her studies and in general feels happy. The mother said she herself is also doing well, and gets support from her parents. The mother spends time with Roshni whenever she is free, after IPER she spends 2-3 hours with her. She uses counseling, sometimes little shouting as a way to discipline her, but said that Roshni is usually quiet.

Roshni is recognised by the teachers for her good behaviour and success in studies. She seems like a happy and confident child who is able to cooperate with other students, take them into account, and share and wait her turn. She has been able to gain acceptance of her peers despite usually not engaging in their misbehaviour. She also seems to be able to motivate and discipline herself, even though she still needs disciplining like all children. She could possibly be more confident in uncomfortable or unfamiliar situations, and not choose to follow the suggestions of other students, as she could be able to make more informed decisions compared to them.

#### 6.4.7 Samaira

Samaira has a good relationship with both of her parents but is closer to her father. She is his "princess", and the only child. She lives with five people, including Rishab (who sleeps at the same house), who she calls her brother. She said she feels very happy at home and in general. The mother spends a lot of time with her because Samaira likes to stay home,

but Samaira said that nowadays they don't spend as much time together or do as many fun things as earlier. She likes to watch TV. The mother comes to IPER.

Samaira's mother likes to be strict with her and uses counseling to discipline her. The mother describes Samaira as a normal child who likes attention. She cries if her parents get angry and plays dramatic in front of her father. The mother feels tired but otherwise ok. Her mother in law, brother, sister-in-law, and family can support her.

Samaira is an elegant child who likes to dress up in a stylish manner. She seems calm and lively at the same time, and is able to focus well on activities. She is able to follow orders and communicate clearly. She is confident and is not afraid to try to develop her skills, even if she would have high expectations for herself.

#### 6.4.8 Shrabouni

According to the mother, Shrabouni doesn't like to go to school or IPER and has dropped out of class one. The mother is a domestic worker who goes to work at 8-9AM and returns home at 7PM. She doesn't have much time to spend with her daughters. The father is not working as much as the mother and doesn't want to share his income with his family. He also doesn't offer any other kind of support. The mother said she is depressed. According to her, Shrabouni is very hyperactive and stubborn, so her father gets angry sometimes and beats her. Mother also beats her and sometimes tries to bribe her. Both parents drink alcohol, especially the father. The mother said she sometimes gets help from her sister, brother, and father.

Some time after the interview with the mother, Shrabouni came to IPER with a black eye, and it turned out that her mother had punched her and then taken her own life. We decided to try to combine Shrabouni's interview with some crisis counselling. Shrabouni said that she feels good at home and around her parents. However, when she was asked about how she feels at home, she first pointed the image of a worried or scared emoticon. When asked about how she feels in general, she first pointed a neutral emoticon. Soon after that she changed her choices to positive. It seemed that she was not ready to open up at that moment, but we tried to show her our support.

Shrabouni can be both calm or restless depending on the situation. She appears to be a bit confused or worried sometimes. She often looks or tries to look happy, other times she

looks like she is in her thoughts. She might not want to follow orders, but calm and non-aggressive discussions with her that are combined with praise and rewards for positive behaviour, have worked well in her case. It seems that she needs emotional support, encouragement, and stability in her life.

#### 6.4.9 Shreya

According to Shreya, she feels happy, has a good relationship with her parents and feels good at home. She spends time with her parents during the weekend or when they are free. However, one of the teachers said that her parents don't have time for her. According to the father their house is very small, which is why they sometimes have problems sleeping during the summer, and Shreya sleeps with her other relatives. Shreya was underweight when she was born, but has caught up. Few relatives can support the parents. There is no substance abuse in the family according to the father. He said he might shout if Shreya tries to be stubborn. Based on the readily available background information, Shreya is afraid that her mother could beat her if she misbehaves, so she always tries to listen to her. She has also expressed feeling sad due to her mother at school, but I was not able to find out more about the situation.

Shreya is a curious child who likes to get attention. She is confident in her interactions with others, but could benefit from learning how to express her wishes and needs in a more eloquent or composed manner. She sometimes tries to draw attention to herself by not following orders or by shouting. She might also have difficulties to fit in with her peer group because of her behaviour. It might be that she simply does not know how to get positive attention. She seems to appreciate the kind of disciplining that leads to logical consequences and is done without anger.

#### 6.4.10 Sultana

Sultana's mother ran away a year ago with another man and Sultana's little brother, which made Sultana very sad. She misses her younger brother and refuses to talk with her mother. Sultana's aunt takes care of her and has a good relationship with her. The aunt wants her to get educated and to stand on her own feet. The aunt's wellbeing is good and she has time to spend with Sultana. She uses beating and consulting as a way to discipline her. Sultana's uncle helps her.

The aunt said that Sultana's father uses tobacco, but according to Sultana, her father drinks alcohol every day. He often sleeps when drunk, but yesterday (mentioned during the interview) he was angry and hit Sultana so hard on the back that it was difficult for her to breath. Sultana doesn't like her father. Sometimes he adores Sultana and gives her money, but other times he might get angry (when he drinks).

Sultana said she usually feels happy at home and feels happy in general. She doesn't like to go to her grandma's place because her aunt makes her work there. She has a very busy schedule which makes her tired: school, IPER, drawing class, and tuition. She comes back home around 9PM.

Sultana has openly talked about her family situation and her relationship with her family members, and seems emotionally intelligent. She has a temperamental side that might result in direct confrontation of other children, but it also means that she is able to stand up for herself. She might have trouble sharing items or time with others. She might also choose not to follow orders unless there are enough pros and cons as consequences. However, Sultana has reacted positively to the kind of discipline in which expectations are clearly explained to her and rewards or logical consequences are used. She might feel discouraged if she is compared to others either by herself or others, or if she feels that she is not good at something but is expected to take part in that kind of task. She seems to have good practical problem-solving skills, can be persuasive, and is not afraid to test the waters or come up with her own secret plans to achieve what she wants.

## 7 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

My own cultural background probably had an impact on how I interpreted the children's behaviour. It was sometimes challenging to evaluate the children's behaviour and skills because of their young age, since many of their personality traits and social / emotional skills are still developing. Also, the parents and children did not always seem to be completely honest during the interviews because I sometimes received contradictory information. It might be that some of the interviewees did not feel comfortable sharing certain things, or wanted to give a positive image. Maybe there was a fear of judgment or negative consequences, even though we tried to emphasise that the purpose was to help the families. Despite of these challenges, I was able to find out some common issues and patterns in the target group.

It seems that the behaviour and social and emotional skills were better or more developed among children who had at least one supportive, stable and healthy caregiver in their life. It also seems like having a difficult history or challenges in life does not automatically impact a child's overall wellbeing; what matters more is if they get the needed support and solutions on time. According to American Academy of Pediatrics (2020, p. 22), behavioural and emotional symptoms of mental health concerns in school-aged children include anger, bullying, fighting, irritability, fear of separation, fluctuating moods, sadness, isolation, sleep disturbance, and academic decline. Unsurprisingly and based on the results, parental mental illness, substance abuse, and divorce were more common among the children who had more behavioural challenges, unless the problematic parent was absent. Their parents also seemed to have less time for their children or a harmful way of disciplining them.

Parents of at least six children admitted using (or were found out to use) corporal punishment, such as slapping or beating. All the children whose parents did not use corporal punishment were among the highest scoring children in terms of behavioural, social, and emotional skills: Roshni, Nasrin and Samaira. They also had a good relationship with at least one of their caregivers. All children with the lowest scores had parents who used corporal punishment, and children who sometimes slapped or beat other children had parents who did the same to them. The most common behavioural challenges among the whole target group were related to self-management and relationship skills, such as ability to negotiate, wait, share, and focus.

Five of the parents admitted that someone in the family uses drugs or alcohol. Someone had a severe alcohol addiction in at least two of the families. It might be that there are even more issues with substance abuse compared to what the results say, because some of the parents or children did not reveal things that I found out about in other ways. At least four of the children were living only with one of their parents, and / or some other relatives instead of both biological parents, which was surprising to me. It was more common for the fathers to be distant or only in an earning role. On a positive note, more than half of the parents and children said that they have a good relationship with each other, and most of the children said that they are feeling good in general.

Most of the families were living in a single room house with a very small amount of space. It also seems that many children had busy schedules and not enough time to spend with their caregivers. One reason for this was probably that the parents were working most of

the time, as a result of low salaries and poverty. In at least three families the mothers were clearly tired or said that they are tired. Many mothers took care of the housework in addition to working outside their home, and had a lot of pressure to take care of the needs of their family. Preference for male children was visible in the case of two children, where the mother or both parents had left their girl child but kept their boy child.

## 8 SUGGESTIONS

According to American Academy of Pediatrics (2020, p. 42), the protective factors that should be promoted in all children regardless of their situation include parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and socio-emotional competence in children.

Both the caregivers and teachers have a significant role in teaching socio-emotional skills to children. This means that it would be beneficial to support the competence and knowledge of parents and teachers, regarding socio-emotional skills and children's development. One solution could be to organise educational events that are led by professionals who are specialised in the topic. The content could focus, for example, on parenting skills, such as how to build a nurturing relationship with a child, how to create routines, schedules and rituals, how to use positive attention to increase good behaviour, and how to use advanced strategies in different situations (e.g. when children fight).

Because many parents in the target group resorted to beating as a mean of discipline, exploring different ways to discipline children could be beneficial (and how they affect children). Information could also be given about the negative effects of shouting that is done in an aggressive manner as a way to show disapproval for misbehaviour (shouting as a way to get the attention of children who have trouble hearing is acceptable and a different situation). Practising disciplining that is done in a patient manner via reasoning, time-outs, logical consequences, or a loss of privileges, could be beneficial. In the classrooms, more personal attention could be given to individual children, warmer relationships could be built with them, and there could be less waiting time, which might require dividing the group into smaller groups from time to time.

IPER could consider offering shelter for mothers who live under a threat of violence. Educating parents about domestic violence, its different forms, where to get help, and about their legal rights could be beneficial. Sharing all useful information about different

legal rights in general could be beneficial. Because of the challenges in the families, IPER could offer a possibility to get a mental health assessment and diagnosis, but also provide psychotherapy to support the mental health of the parents and children who have a need for it. It could be beneficial also in cases in which a child has developmental issues. Families who struggle with drug misuse could be given counselling and information about rehabilitation options.

Some kind of child care service where the parents could spend time with their children or temporarily bring their children to be taken care of (when they have a good reason for it) might help the parents either to bond with their children or get other things done, or just to take a rest. This is something that is in a way already offered by IPER (via the lessons and activities), but could be offered also outside the normal opening hours (for example in acute situations). There could possibly be more events or travels in which both the parents and their children could take part in, to enhance their bonding. They could include fun freetime activities, such as going to a water park, trampoline park, zoo, etc., if the costs were reasonable.

Because many of the problems in the families were related to poverty, IPER could try to create new sources of income and / or develop the existing ones, to be able to help the families financially. It could include helping families to make useful purchases, such as buying a fridge. If the mothers got better work opportunities and salaries, they could have more time to spend with their children, which is why they could be encouraged to think about options related entrepreneurship. The artworks or products created by mothers and children could be sold online or in a traditional store, to generate income. Some of the empty rooms at IPER could be rented out to travellers via different channels, or turned into community spaces or otherwise productive spaces. The donation page on IPER's homepage could be fixed, or it could be made otherwise easier for people to donate, and new donors could be searched for by sending advocates to different events, to represent IPER.

**Summary of the suggestions:**

- Educational events for parents and teachers related to the following topics:
  - Parenting skills (e.g. how to build a nurturing and stable relationship with a child and what strategies to use in different situations).
  - Different ways to discipline children and their impacts on children.
  - Child development (needs of children at different ages).
  - Domestic violence (its different forms and where to get help).
  - Substance abuse and addictions (what help is available).
  - Legal rights of Indian citizens and possible benefits that they are entitled to.
  - Entrepreneurship (skills and opportunities).
  
- Mental health assessment and psychotherapy.
- Assessment of developmental challenges.
- Rehabilitation services for substance misuse, or referrals to equivalent services.
- Shelter for mothers who live under a threat of violence.
- Low-threshold places for parents and children to spend time together.
- 24/7 child care service for acute situations.
- Fun events or travels for parents and children to enhance their bonding.
- Creating new sources of income and developing the existing ones, in order to support the families financially.
- Artworks or products created by mothers and children could be sold online or in a traditional store.
- Empty rooms at IPER could be rented out to travellers via different channels, or turned into productive spaces.
- Fixing the donation page or making it easier for people to donate.
- Finding new donors, e.g. by sending advocates to different events.

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