

City nurseries piling the pressure on kids [IN]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

In attempting to hasten your child's development, nursery schools may be doing them harm

Learn to walk before you attempt to run, is a bit of advice that is all too familiar to us. It's been ingrained that without the basics, everything complex just doesn't add up. But a study conducted by the SNDT University on the implementation of writing exercises at nursery schools, has found that children aged between three and five years are forced to write long sentences, and even taught cursive writing, well before it is considered healthy to do so. The study found that nursery classes attached to primary and secondary schools conduct written exams for half an hour in English and Maths.

"In our study, we found that nursery schools hasten the process of development in an unhealthy manner. A three-year-old is expected to read and write long sentences with punctuation and add numbers up to 100," said Dr Reeta Sonawat, head of the Human Development Department at SNDT.

According to child health experts, children do not develop fine muscular movement before the age of six, and hastening the process will lead to bad hand-eye coordination. "At that age, muscles are not ready for fine movements, such as writing, which needs a good grip and hand-eye coordination. Forcing nursery children into formal education will result in low self-esteem, aggression and depression," said Dr Anjali Chabaria, child psychiatrist.

The study done in nine schools from Bandra to Mira Road included a sample of 800 students, 155 parents and 50 teachers. A survey of parents' expectations of their children revealed that around 60 per cent of parents expected their children to write long sentences and numbers up to 100.

Komal Pandya, a second-year master of human development student, conducted the study over a period of three months. "I found that most students had the wrong grip and had developed a fear of writing. Some students were even labelled as dyslexic if they were slow learners," said Pandya.

At the nursery level, the recommended mode of teaching is through unstructured and informal activity. "Rigid methods, where teachers use the ruler and blackboard are harmful to young children. Creative ways such as painting, scribbling, identifying colours, sorting cubes, and reciting poems should be used," said Sonawat.

But, at times, parents encourage nurseries to institute a rigorous regime. According to the study, high expectations from parents and competition lead to schools tightening the structure of syllabus taught at the pre-primary level. "When I see my four-year old niece speaking such fluent english and writing letters to her mum, I naturally don't want my child to fall behind in her studies. With such tough competition, my child has to do well to get admission into good schools," said Dadar resident, Nandita Kothari.

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