

1.1 Contract number- RG/93/M/1

1.2 Title of Project- Influence of employment status of mother on the physical growth, development and behaviour of pre-school children.

1.3 Chief scientific investigator- Dr. G.A.T.K. Athauda

1.4 Summary-

The influence of employment status of the mother on behaviour, cognitive and psychomotor development, physical growth, illness and home accident pattern of preschool children from lower socioeconomic groups was studied using a cross sectional approach. Children of mothers employed overseas were studied in comparison with a group whose mothers were employed in Sri Lanka and a group whose mothers were not employed. Special emphasis was paid to study the children of mothers employed overseas. There were 411 children in each group who were matched for age and sex. A wide range of study instruments were used to collect the required information and steps were taken to improve validity of data.

Children in group 1 were at a disadvantage when some paternal factors were considered. They had fathers who were least educated and who spent the least amount of time with the index child. The highest percentage of fathers who were smoking, consuming alcohol and narcotic drugs were also seen in this group. Group 1 had the lowest socio-economic status and the highest percentage

of single parent families. Not only the employment status of the mother but also the paternal factors mentioned above might have influenced the poor performance of the children in group 1.

A high proportion of children with abnormal behaviour, higher incidence of illness and home accidents and those with home environments not conducive to better 'health' of the pre-school child were seen among the children of mothers employed overseas. There were no major differences between the groups in the assessment of physical growth and cognitive and psychosocial development. In general, the health status of children of mothers employed overseas was comparatively lower than that of the other two groups. The best overall performance was seen in children whose mothers were employed locally.

Women of lower income groups seek overseas employment, in order to improve their economic standards, which they expect may lead to a better quality of life. The pre school children of these mothers seem to be an important group for which special child welfare activities should be aimed at, in order to reduce the negative impact on their overall health status. The role of the father also needs to be considered in developing such programmes.