The main objective of this study was to understand the Emotional/Behavioural disorders of preschoolers in the age group of 3 to 6 years from urban and rural settings. The focus of the study was to assess the prevalence of emotional problems and to explore the various child and family related variables as contributing factors of emotional disorders. The study also aimed at evaluating the social skills training programme for its effects on the control of these problems.

A multi-phase design was adopted to study the set objectives. In the first phase, a sample of 440 preschoolers from three urban preschool centres and 195 children from five rural anganwadi centres in villages were screened on the basis of teacher ratings using Preschool Behaviour Check List.

In the second phase of study a 2 x 2 Factorial Design was adopted with urban-rural and normal/disturbed status as independent variables. A sample of 200 children with 50 in each of the four groups were assessed for emotional/behavioural problems, temperament, social competence, intelligence and cognitive styles. The family variables assessed included the psychological health of the mothers, their attitude towards child rearing and family interaction patterns. Information was collected through home visits using questionnaires, rating scales and psychological tests.
In the third phase, a quasi experimental design was adopted. From among a group of twenty emotionally disturbed children ten each were randomly assigned to Experimental and Control groups. The experimental group of children underwent 30 sessions of Social Skills training through group play.

The data was analyzed using percentages, chi squares, 't' ratios, ANOVA, and Discriminant Functions Analysis. The findings were as follows:

The prevalence of Emotional/Behavioural disorders among preschoolers was 21.88 per cent. The prevalence was more among rural preschoolers (25.64%) than among urban (20.22%) and more among boys (29.48%) than among girls (13.72%). The high probability symptoms were poor concentration and high activity level.

The findings of the second phase indicated that premature births were more common among rural emotionally disturbed children. Significant differences were noticed between the emotionally disturbed and normal children. The children who were emotionally disturbed manifested mild to moderate degree of fears, social fears, aggression, sibling rivalry, mood fluctuations, attention seeking and eating problems. Temperamentally they were arrhythmic, less adaptable and showed negative moods. Average intellectual capacity and field dependent cognitive styles were noticed in
disturbed children. The mothers of emotionally disturbed children showed the presence of psychiatric morbidity with somatic symptom, anxiety and depression. The maternal attitude revealed ascendancy and non encouragement of verbalization in children. The family interaction pattern was inadequate.

Discriminant functions differentiated urban normal children from rural disturbed children. Similarly, urban disturbed children were differentiated from rural normal children. The variables with high correlation in function indicative of characteristic features of rural disturbed children were: social fears, mood fluctuations, temper tantrums and aggression. The urban disturbed children showed more of attention seeking, hyperactivity, eating problems and separation anxiety.

Age differences and their relationship with the behavioural problems were observed. Children of 3 to 4 years experienced separation anxiety and fears. Temperamentally they were distractible, less adaptable and they withdrew more. Children in the latter part of preschool period (5 to 6 years) showed social fears, sibling rivalry and apathy. Many of the family related variables such as maternal attitude of fostering dependency, irritability, suppression of anxiety and sexuality were found to have repercussions on the behaviour of older children.
With regard to birth order, the last born and the only child were more prone to emotional/behavioural problems. The behavioural problems were more in the middle class SES groups.

The social skills training through group play was effective in reducing the emotional/behavioural problems of preschoolers. These findings were discussed in the context of Temperamental and Attachment Models and the Socio Ecological Models. A wide range of implications is suggested.