Global Early Childhood Development Programs

A summary of the scientific literature on early childhood development programs on a global scale.



How This Impacts Children's Development

As of 2011, a quarter of the world's youngest children suffer one or more forms of severe deprivation and risk, such as poverty, disease, and exposure to violence. Effective early childhood development (ECD) programs can mitigate the developmental risks that millions of children face due to extreme poverty or stunting. In addition, research on child development in developing countries is important in informing our broader understanding of child development and improving the lives of children in those countries.

READ THE BRIEF: high-quality early childhood development: implementing large-scale programs in global contexts, 2018

READ THE BRIEF: CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 2012

READ THE BRIEF: Early Childhood Development Programs in Global Contexts: Improving Quality, 2011

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- As of 2018, more than 70 nations have national early childhood development (ECD) laws, with most enacted in the last 20 years with a focus on access rather than quality.
- Focusing solely on expanding services and access to programs can yield mixed results, as increased access isn't always paired with improvements in quality. It is crucial to prioritize program quality to achieve better outcomes.
- ECD programs should coordinate to provide a continuum of services across ages and integration across types of programs (e.g., health, parenting education, nutrition, early childhood education).
- Key issues in implementing integrated, high-quality early childhood development (ECD) services include multisectoral coordination, ensuring quality at the systems level, addressing population-level demand, and creating developmentally informed service sequences.
- Two approaches to achieving high-quality programs at scale are: a "small-to-bigger" approach, which involves expanding successful small-scale pilot initiatives to broader populations, and a "big-to-better" approach, which focuses on improving existing large-scale programs.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. Improve research and evaluation capacity by building partnerships among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, creating systems for ongoing data collection on program quality to inform decisions, and disseminating information on effective approaches to improving quality.
2. Promote an ECD program quality framework that considers systems and settings, focuses on a broader range of recipients, and incorporates cross-cutting dimensions of program quality.
3. Encourage efforts to accurately record and track quality data should occur at national, subnational, and municipal or local levels to move beyond simply authorizing spending to create indicators of implementation quality at scale.
4. Emerging evidence shows that programs that support parental education and/or family income (such as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs)) support the progression of children in developing countries.

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