

Early Childhood Interventions and Women's Wellbeing

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Women, Children, and Inequality

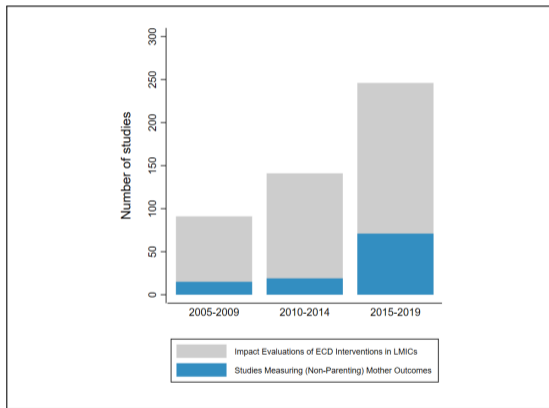
Gender inequality is prevalent at work and at home

- In both rich and poor countries around the world, women are less likely to be in the labor force than men, and when they do work, they often receive lower pay for comparable work
- Women's unequal carework burden contributes to the lack of equality in the labor market: women take lower paying jobs, they juggle work with childcare responsibilities, etc.

Human capital investments in early childhood are critical determinants of later life outcomes

- Getting households to invest more nurturing care for young children is a policy priority, and much of this investment typically comes in the form of women's and girls' time

What Do We Know About the Impacts of ECD Interventions on Women?



Source: Evans, Jakiela, and Knauer (2021)

The Impacts of Center-Based Childcare

Promising evidence on the impacts of daycare/preschool on women and children:

- 83 percent of estimated impacts of childcare on children in LMICs are positive
 - ▶ Almost no evidence of potential negative impacts on cognitive development or socioemotional learning, slightly less consistent evidence on access/takeup and health
- Clear evidence that access to childcare increases women's labor supply in many contexts

Some puzzling findings:

- In Uganda, childcare increased fathers' labor supply – though fathers do little childcare – and only increased women's labor supply and income for mothers without a male partner
- In the DRC, childcare increased fathers' involvement in income-generating activities, though it had no impact on their carework hours (which were almost zero at baseline)

Question 1

Why does childcare impact fathers' labor supply, involvement in income-generating activities, and income when fathers do so little childrearing and domestic work in most LMIC contexts?

- Do women end up picking up other domestic responsibilities from fathers?
- If so, does access to childcare improve their welfare?

Mixed evidence at present:

- In Uganda, access to childcare improved women's subjective wellbeing (though, again, childcare only improved income and labor supply for women with no partner at baseline)
- Null or moderately negative impacts of childcare in (some) other contexts
- Very few studies of center-based care measure mothers' wellbeing, mental health, etc.

The Impacts of Parenting Education for Mothers

Home visits and group-based parenting education are the main alternative to center-based care, growing body of evidence suggests they can be developmentally effective for young children

- One concern about these types of interventions is that they: (i) occupy women's time and (ii) may increase women's carework burden by changing expectations about parenting

Evidence that home visits and mothers' education can improve maternal mental health:

- Home visits: Bangladesh, Guatemala, Jamaica, Iran, South Africa
- Group classes/meetings: Bangladesh, Jamaica, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, Uganda, Zambia

Question 2

Why/how do home visits and parenting classes improve mothers' mental wellbeing?

- Is parenting knowledge, self-efficacy the primary mechanisms?
- Are these interventions improving young mothers' social support networks?

What Do Fathers Do, Anyway?

Fathers do very little parenting in many LMIC contexts

- Rich literature in demography, anthropology, and economics suggests that the impacts of father absence (from migration or death/separation) on children are surprisingly small

In the last decade, the literature on engaging fathers has exploded
(from essentially zero impact evaluations to a handful of impact evaluations)

- Very few successes, quite a few failed studies where takeup was essentially zero
- Even when interventions succeed at improving fathers' parenting knowledge, they tend to fail in terms of behavioral change – targeting mothers seems to be far more effective

Question 3

Should we be trying to (better) engage fathers in parenting, and if so, how?

- Do we risk undermining mothers' autonomy within the household?
- Are father-focused interventions missed opportunities to target mothers?

Takeaways and Directions for Future Research

A lack of agency in the household provides a unifying framework to explain my observations

- Daycare/preschool free up women's time, which is reallocated to other domestic tasks
- ECD interventions that strengthen women's social networks have unintended benefits
- Fathers just don't do childcare (at least for young children)