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Benefits of Early Child Development Programs

A vast body of research has demonstrated that Early Child Development (ECD) programs benefit children, families, and communities. The reduced dropout and repetition rates, improved school achievements, greater adult productivity, and higher levels of social and emotional functioning encouraged by ECD programs make them a highly cost-effective means of strengthening society as a whole by ensuring that its individual members live up to their full potentials.

Evaluations of well-conceived programs designed to foster early development demonstrate that children who participate in these programs tend to be more successful in later school, are more competent socially and emotionally, and show better verbal, intellectual and physical development during early childhood than children who are not enrolled in high quality programs. Benefits of ECD interventions can be found in the following areas:

- Higher intelligence scores
- Higher and timelier school enrollment
- Less grade repetition and lower dropout rates
- Higher school completion rates
- Improved nutrition and health status
- Improved social and emotional behavior
- Improved parent-child relationship
- Increased earning potential and economic self-sufficiency as an adult
- Increased female labor force participation

ECD programs in the United States

Longitudinal studies of child development programs conducted in the United States have provided considerable data supporting the positive impact of Early Child Development (ECD) programs. One of the most striking results of the evaluations is that many of the programs resulted in increased school completion rates. Most studies of the economic returns of high school completion indicate that an additional year of high school is associated with an 8 percent increase in lifetime wages (Currie and Thomas 1995, Angrist 1990). It is also well established that academic performance in the early grades is a significant predictor of eventual high school completion (Ensminger and Slusarcick 1992, in Currie and Thomas 1995; Barrington and Hendricks 1989; Cairns et al 1989; Grissom and Shepard 1989; Lloyd 1978; Stroup and Robbins 1972). Therefore, if an ECD program can improve performance in the early grades, it can increase the probability of high school graduation with attended improvements in future wages and employment opportunities. Even a few years of early schooling, it appears, can substantially increase the economic value of an individual's skills (Van der Gaag & Tan, 1998; Van der Gaag, 1997; Psacharopoulos 1994, 1986; Selowsky 1981).

In addition to increased earnings through increased schooling, participation in ECD programs is associated with reduced criminality and reduced welfare utilization as an adult (Schweinhart et al. 1993). The long-term impact of early interventions dramatically influences their cost-effectiveness. The

"High/Scope Perry Preschool Project" is estimated to have saved US\$7.16 for every US\$1.00 invested due to savings in lower education and welfare expenditures combined with gains in productivity over time.

ECD programs in the developing world

Evaluations of ECD programs operating in developing countries show considerable positive outcomes for participating children. Several longitudinal studies demonstrate the substantial long-term impact. The following benefits have been firmly linked to integrated interventions in early childhood:

- **Improved nutrition and health.**

By providing psychosocial stimulation, ECD programs can enhance the efficacy of health care and nutrition initiatives. They can also help ensure that children receive health care. Children participating in the Colombia Community Child Care and Nutrition Project, for instance, are required to complete their immunizations within six months of entering the program. Programs can also monitor growth and provide food supplements and micronutrients, as in India's Integrated Child Development Services program, and can help with such existing public health efforts as mass immunizations. Other programs specifically aim at changing parent behavior by educating parents about the health and nutrition needs of their children.

- **Improved cognitive development and school achievement.**

Children who participated in early child interventions under Jamaica's First Home Visiting Program, Colombia's Cali project, Peru's Programa No Formal de Educacion Inicial (Pronoei), and the Turkey Early Enrichment Project scored higher on average on intellectual aptitude tests than did non-participants. Early education activities aren't the only thing that improve cognitive development; better health and nutrition can have a similar impact, too. For instance, a longitudinal analysis of child nutrition in the Philippines shows how better nourished children perform significantly better in school (Glewwe, Jacoby and King, 2001).

- **Higher school enrollment.**

The Colombia Promesa program cited significantly higher enrollment rates (in later schooling) among program children than among non-participants.

- **Less Repetition.**

Children who participated in an early childhood program repeated fewer grades and made better progress through school than did non-participants in similar circumstances. Children in the Colombia Promesa study, in the Alagoas and Fortaleza study in Northeast Brazil, and in the Argentina study all had on average lower rates of repetition.

- **Fewer dropouts.**

Dropout rates were lower for program children in three of four studies. In India's Dalmau program, the only study in which attendance was measured, the later school attendance was 16 percent higher for children ages six to eight. In Colombia's Promesa project, third-grade enrollment rates rose by 100 percent, reflecting lower dropout and repetition rates. Moreover, 60 percent of program children reached the fourth grade, compared with only 30 percent of children in the comparison group.

- **Help for the disadvantaged and reduced social inequality.**

There is mounting evidence that interventions in early childhood particularly benefit the poor and disadvantaged. In India's Haryana project, for instance, dropout rates did not change significantly for children from the higher caste but fell a dramatic 46 percent for the lower caste and an astonishing 80 percent for the middle caste (Chaturvedi et al 1987). A study conducted in Jamaica gives unequivocal proof that nutritional supplementation for undernourished children, who are most likely to come from disadvantaged families, improves mental development

(Grantham-McGregor et al 1991). Programs in India and Guatemala resulted in a significant decline in the enrollment age for another traditionally disadvantaged group -- girls (Myers 1995).

- **A positive effect on female labor force participation and older siblings' schooling with affordable programs.**

A study on the effects of child care costs on households' behavior in Kenya shows how women's labor force participation and older children's schooling are effected by the costs of ECD programs. For households with children aged three to seven, the authors model household demand for mothers' participation in paid work, the participation in paid work of other household members, household demand for schooling, and household demand for child care. They find that: (a) A high cost for child care discourages households from using formal child care facilities and has a negative effect on mothers' participation in market work; (b) The cost of child care and the level of mothers' wages affect older children's school enrollment, but these factors affect boys' and girls' schooling differently. An increase in mothers' wages increases boys' enrollment but depresses girls' enrollment; (c) Higher child care costs have no significant effect on boys' schooling but significantly decrease the number of girls in school (Lokshin, Glinskaya & Garcia 2000).

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