

Scalable Policies for Early Childhood Development

One of the key challenges in rapidly developing economies with large inequalities is to ensure all can benefit from growth. However, children from poor backgrounds are vulnerable to negative influences including un-stimulating environments and malnutrition all of which may be induced by poverty and may have detrimental effects on child cognitive, social-emotional and physical, development. Neurobiological science has established that the first three years of life lay the basis for lifelong outcomes due to the rapid development of the brain architecture. These deficits limit adult opportunities and in turn contribute to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and economic inequality. The aim of this study is to develop and test scalable interventions that promote child development and ultimately improve adult outcomes breaking the cycle of poverty.

The study consists of two projects both of which implement a stimulation program that focuses on improving interactions between mothers or principal caregivers and their infants/children with the aim of achieving better child and later life outcomes. The program follows a systematic weekly curriculum based on the natural developmental stages of the child. The curriculum was originally developed and tested by Sally Grantham-McGregor, and colleagues in Jamaica, and has been shown to improve cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes of the beneficiary children from childhood through to adulthood. In the second larger study we combine stimulation with nutrition communication whose focus will be to inform and train the mothers/caregivers in sound infant and young child feeding practices that have been known to play a crucial role in undernutrition.

In this study, we will test alternative service provisions, which include delivery of the curriculum by local women either (i) during weekly individual home visits to the child's family and in collaboration with the mother, or (ii) in a suitably modified way, within the context of weekly group meetings with the mothers.

The interventions will be accompanied by an evaluation based on a randomized control trial. We will collect data on child development outcomes and detailed maternal- and household-level data before the start and following the intervention.

The two study projects are:

A. Stimulation in the slums of Cuttack – Odisha

Research team: Orazio Attanasio, Britta Augsburg, Sally Grantham-McGregor, Costas Meghir, Smriti Pahwa, Jena Hamadani, Monimalika Day and Marta Rubio-Codina

Partner Organizations: UCL, IFS, J-Pal, Pratham Education Foundation-ASER Centre, CECED and Yale

Funding: Mr. Rushton Turner and the Waterloo Foundation

This is a smaller scale pilot implemented by Pratham in the slums of Cuttack and will deliver to the treatment communities a one-year stimulation program involving weekly home visits delivered by local women. The program will cover 400 children between 1 and 2 years of age at the start of the intervention. Evaluation will take place based on a randomized control trial where 54 communities will be divided equally into treatment and control. This project is funded by a private gift from Mr. Rushton-Turner and by the Waterloo Foundation.

B. Early Childhood Development: Impacting at Scale

Partner Organizations

Yale University: Costas Meghir (PI) and Pia Britto

IFS: Orazio Attanasio, Britta Augsburg, Sally Grantham-McGregor and Marta Rubio-Codina

University of Pennsylvania: Jere Behrman

Pratham Education Foundation-ASER centre: Smriti Pahwa

CECED: Monimalika Day, Venita Kaul

J-Pal

Funding: The National Institutes for Health (USA)

This second project is a large-scale trial implemented in a number of districts in Odisha. For evaluation purposes the communities are randomly allocated to three treatment arms and a control group. Two of the treatment arms combine nutrition communication with (i) Stimulation by Home visiting and (ii) Stimulation by group intervention. The third arm includes only nutrition communication. The study will cover overall 200 communities with all families with children in the age range of 9-15 months being included. The intervention will be implemented by Pratham teams in the selected districts of Odisha and will last for two years.