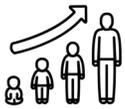


Factsheet: Early Childhood Development in Crisis Contexts

Dollar for dollar, investments in early childhood development (ECD) are some of the most valuable bets we can make on our collective future. Elements of ECD programs such as caregiver support and playful learning can be crucial ingredients for success. This factsheet highlights key facts and statistics about ECD in crisis contexts. We hope you find it to be a valuable resource for adding citations to your future advocacy and communications products.



The Importance of The Early Years

The first eight years of life are the most important for human development.

UNICEF, "[Learning through Play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes](#)," 2018.

During a child's first three years, they can make up to one million neural connections a second, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and productivity.

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "[InBrief: The Science of Early Childhood Development](#)," 2007.

Children who do more physical exploration in the first five months of life may be more successful in school as late as age 14.

Bornstein, Hahn, and Suwalsky, "[Physically Developed and Exploratory Young Infants Contribute to Their Own Long-Term Academic Achievement](#)," 2013.

Children who are behind cognitive benchmarks when they enter elementary school are more likely to experience later educational difficulties.

Grantham-McGregor, et al., "[Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries](#)," 2007.

ECD programs have had long-term positive effects on children living in adversity, including higher wages earned as an adult, greater educational attainment, improved cognitive abilities, reduced violence, and fewer depressive symptoms.

Nores and Barnett, "[Benefits of early childhood interventions across the world: \(Under\) Investing in the very young](#)," 2010.

Gertler, et al., "[Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica](#)," 2014.

Black, et al., "[Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course](#)," 2016.

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), "[Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development](#)," 2020.

Walker, et al., "[Cognitive, psychosocial, and behaviour gains at age 31 years from the Jamaica early childhood stimulation trial](#)," 2021.

Evidence shows that quality support in the early years for young children and their caregivers can provide returns of up to 13 percent a year through improved education, health, legal, and economic outcomes—even after adjusting for the cost of the program.

García, et al., "[The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program](#)," 2016.



The Effects of Conflict and Crisis

Exposure to conflict can delay early childhood development—and chronic exposure can compound this risk.

Goto, Frodl, and Skokauskas, "[Armed Conflict and Early Childhood Development in 12 Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#)," 2021.

Exposure to conflict during early childhood can negatively impact a child’s mental health, resulting in symptoms of PTSD, behavioral and emotional problems, difficulties with healthy play, and difficulties sleeping.

Slone and Mann, "[Effects of War, Terrorism and Armed Conflict on Young Children: A Systematic Review](#)," 2016.

Severe stress during early childhood can damage the architecture of a young child’s developing brain, leading to learning difficulties and potentially lifelong physical and mental challenges including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "[The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do](#)," 2007.

Prolonged exposure to violence can have a long-lasting impact on a child’s ability to process and understand emotions.

Umilta et al., "[Impact of civil war on emotion recognition: the denial of sadness in Sierra Leone](#)," 2013.



The Scope of the Problem

More than 71 million children around the world have spent their entire lifetimes in areas affected by conflict. One in six children is living in an active conflict zone.

Peace Research Institute Oslo, "[Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2019](#)," 2020.

As of the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million people worldwide who had been forcibly displaced from their homes, 42 percent of whom were children.

UNHCR, "[Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020](#)," 2020.

More than 175 million children around the world are not enrolled in formal pre-primary education, including 8 out of 10 children in low-income countries.

UNICEF, "[COVID-19: Trends, Promising Practices and Gaps in Remote Learning for Pre-Primary Education](#)," 2020.



A Lack of Sufficient Funding

Globally, ECD accounts for just over 3 percent of all development assistance going to crisis-affected countries and only 2 percent of humanitarian assistance.

Moving Minds Alliance, "[Analysis of international aid levels for early childhood services in crisis contexts](#)," 2020.

95 percent of funding directed to ECD programming worldwide is spent on health and nutrition-related interventions, leaving little left for education or other crucial topics such as water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Moving Minds Alliance, "[Analysis of international aid levels for early childhood services in crisis contexts](#)," 2020.



The Essential Role of Caregivers

Healthy, responsive relationships with caregivers can literally shape the architecture of a young brain, laying a solid foundation for long-term physical and mental health.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "[The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do](#)," 2007.

Programs that support and encourage caregivers to interact and play in healthy and stimulating ways with their young children can improve children's cognitive development.

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), "[Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development](#)," 2020.

ECD programs that support caregivers in forming nurturing relationships with their children can mitigate some of the negative effects of toxic stress.

Theirworld, "[Ensuring Quality Early Childhood Education for Refugee Children: A New Approach to Teacher Professional Development](#)."

Parents often report that playing with their children is an important factor in their own happiness that strengthens their relationship with their child and helps them to de-stress.

The LEGO Foundation, "[LEGO Play Well Report 2018](#)," 2018.

Early childhood development programs that support caregivers in caring for their children can improve caregivers' own mental health as well.

J-PAL, "[The Effects of a Play-Based Preschool Learning Program in Rural Ghana](#)."

Singla, Kumbakumba, and Aboud, "[Effects of a parenting intervention to address maternal psychological wellbeing and child development and growth in rural Uganda](#)," 2015.

Husain et al., "[An integrated parenting intervention for maternal depression and child development in a low-resource setting](#)," 2021.



Healing and Learning through Play

Play can foster cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills and wellbeing.

Ginsburg et al., "[The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds](#)," 2007.

Play can help build complex abilities in children such as resilience, creativity, and self-advocacy.

Milteer et al., "[The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds: focus on children in poverty](#)," 2012.

Encouraging healthy play with caregivers can have positive effects on children up to 30 years later.

Walker, et al., "[Cognitive, psychosocial, and behaviour gains at age 31 years from the Jamaica early childhood stimulation trial](#)," 2021.

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