

## **ABSTRACT**

### A Caregiver Training Intervention to Enhance the Development of Children in Child Care Facilities

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The first years are a critical period in the development of a child's brain and the child's experiences have a significant impact on brain structure and function. Children in institutions are at risk for severe developmental delays. Adoption studies show that children who spend their early years in residential care are at highest risk of long term cognitive and social-emotional problems. The aim of this study was to improve the development of children aged 0 – 3½ years in child care facilities by training their caregivers in the principles of good care giving interactions with young children and early childhood stimulation.

Six residential child care facilities representing all available facilities with children in the requisite age group in three parishes were selected, paired by size and randomly assigned to either intervention or control groups. All children aged 6 to 42 months who did not have any physical or mental challenges which could affect development were selected n= 77. The children's development was assessed with the Griffiths mental development scales, at baseline and after nine months of intervention. The number and quality of interactions between the caregivers and children were recorded

using an observation instrument developed for the study and a questionnaire on care-giving practices was administered to the caregivers. The study was conducted in 2 phases; a cluster randomised controlled experiment in phase 1 and a quasi-experiment in phase 2. In phase 2 the intervention was implemented in the control homes in phase 1. They were compared with the phase 1 control children as no new control homes were available.

The observations of caregiver interactions showed that they spoke very little to the children and mostly gave commands. After the phase 1 intervention the caregivers talked to and praised the children more. The caregivers praised, played, showed more love to the children and gave them fewer commands after the phase 2 intervention compared to the controls. There was no significant improvement in the global DQ or subscale scores in phase 1 but in phase 2 the intervention resulted in a benefit of 12.5 points in the performance subscale ( $p=0.000$ ), 7.6 points in locomotor ( $p=0.054$ ) and 4.0 global DQ points ( $p=0.073$ ) compared to the control group. Similar results were obtained by multilevel multiple regression analysis; performance:  $B=12.6$ ,  $p=0.0001$ , locomotor:  $B=7.6$ ,  $p=0.04$  and DQ:  $B=4.0$ ,  $p=0.06$ .

Children in child care facilities are developing poorly and would benefit from an enriched environment with more consistent stimulation. The intervention improved the children's DQ and caregiver practices.

**Keywords:** Dawn Marie Stephenson, child care facilities, institutionalization, development quotient (DQ), caregiver, stimulation