Advancing Research and Learning on Parenting Interventions in Low-Resource or Humanitarian Settings

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Rationale for research on parenting interventions

• Well-established evidence base but **less implemented and tested** in low-resource or humanitarian settings

• **Promise** for improving parenting practices and reducing risk factors for child maltreatment in developing countries

• However, **lack of methodological rigor and mixed findings on intervention effects** need to be addressed through further research

(Knerr, Gardner & Cluver, 2011; Mejia, Calam & Sanders, 2012).
Research Questions from 3 impact evaluations

• Cross-cutting research questions include examining impact on:
  • Positive parenting practices
  • Use of harsh forms of discipline, including physical punishment
  • Parent-child interaction (e.g. communication)
  • Child psychosocial wellbeing

• Project-specific research questions include examining impact on:
  • Family functioning (Burundi and Thai-Burma border)
  • Economic outcomes and child labor (Burundi)
  • Child cognitive and verbal skills development (Liberia)
  • Malaria prevention knowledge and practices (Liberia)
  • Parental alcohol use (Thai-Burma border)
Intervention

• Varying use of evidence-based interventions versus context-specific adaptation
  • Locally developed (Burundi)
  • Nurturing Parenting plus additions/adaptations (Liberia)
  • Strengthening Families Program plus adaptations (Thai-Burma border)

• Target population
  • Adult caregivers of children aged 10-14 (Burundi), 3-7 (Liberia) or 8-12 (Thai-Burma border)
  • Children aged 8-12 (Thai-Burma border)
Intervention (continued)

• Structure and content
  • 10-12 weekly group discussion sessions
  • 3 home visits (Liberia only)
  • Topics included: anger and stress management; behavior management techniques; consequences of harsh punishment; communication and problem solving skills

• Delivery
  • IRC staff only (Burundi and Liberia)
  • Mixture of IRC staff and community-based facilitators (Thai-Burma border)
Evaluation design and methodology

- All evaluations had a randomized waitlist controlled trial design, with a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods
- Respondents included adult caregivers and children
- Combination of validated and novel or adapted measures
- Evaluation on Thai-Burma border included 6-month follow up
Summary of research findings

- **Significant decrease in harsh discipline** (physical, verbal, psychological) in Burundi and Liberia, and at six month follow up on Thai-Burma border

- **Significant improvement in parenting practices and parent-child interaction** on Thai-Burma border, and according to child report only in Burundi and Liberia

- **Significant improvement in family functioning** (cohesion, communication) on Thai-Burma border, but not in Burundi

- **No significant impact** on child outcomes (psychosocial, mental health, cognitive) across all three projects
Lessons learned

- Parenting interventions can be **effective at improving parenting practices and decreasing the use of harsh punishment** in low-resource or humanitarian settings.
- Mixed findings point to the need for more **focused** interventions.
- Some changes, particularly those related to child outcomes which are more distal, may **require more time to emerge**.
- Other reasons for null results on child outcomes may relate to lack of child participation in the intervention or measurement.
- Low endorsement of harsh discipline practices at baseline suggest **strong social desirability bias** among respondents.
Future research

• Understand impact of child participation in intervention on child outcomes

• Adapt and test use of alternative forms of measurement beyond self-report (e.g. observation)

• Include longer follow-up period in all impact evaluations (one year minimum)

• Explore opportunities for scalability
Thank you!