



Policy Brief

Preventing child abuse and interpersonal violence in low- and middle-income countries: Parenting interventions

Parenting interventions aim to help parents to parent more effectively, especially when their children exhibit difficult or problem behaviour. They employ positive, non-physical techniques, and aim to be compatible with the parents' beliefs and values. Parenting interventions have been tested extensively in high-income countries, and are shown to reduce harsh parenting, child maltreatment, parent-child conflict, and child problem behaviour.

Why are parenting interventions important? Even in high-risk situations, positive parent-child relationships and a sensitive, responsive and consistent style of parenting, particularly in early childhood, have been shown to play protective roles in child development. Parenting factors can buffer and mediate the effects of wider family and community factors on children's development, particularly boys' aggression.

The Questions:

- Can parenting interventions help to prevent harsh parenting and child maltreatment in low- and middle-income countries?
- Can parenting interventions help to prevent children's behaviour problems and violence later in life in low- and middle-income countries?

The Research:

- Systematic literature review of randomized controlled trials of parenting interventions.
- Investigating the effectiveness of parenting interventions for: reducing harsh/abusive parenting, increasing positive parenting practices, and improving parent-child relationships in LMICs.

In short, parenting interventions are an important and potentially fundamental approach to the prevention of child maltreatment and promotion of safe, nurturing, non-violent home settings – both in the immediate family and in the next generation. Evidence-based parenting programmes have been developed mainly in Australia and the USA, and have been used and tested in many countries, and implemented in many more countries in both high- and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

While definitions of child physical and psychological maltreatment may differ across cultures and countries, poor or harsh parenting is a critical risk factor for maltreatment worldwide, particularly in the early years. Most research on child maltreatment comes from high-income countries.

Conclusions: This review found 12 studies with 1580 parents in 9 countries, all of which found that the parenting intervention being tested was effective compared to control groups (which received another intervention or no intervention). While, the reliability and validity of results for most studies was unclear, the results of the two largest, highest-quality trials suggest that **parenting interventions are feasible and effective in improving parent-child interaction and parental knowledge and attitudes in relation to child development among parents of young children in LMICs.**

Thus, parenting interventions may be important in addressing prevention of child maltreatment in these settings. There is also evidence of the potential contribution of parenting interventions to preventing violence among boys throughout the life cycle, but overall, gender socialisation in parenting interventions remains largely unexplored.

Given the well-established evidence base for parenting interventions in high-income countries, and increasingly good evidence for their applicability across cultures and countries, there is now an urgent need for more rigorously evaluated and reported studies, focusing on youth outcomes as well as parenting, adapted for contexts of considerable resource constraints and particularly populations strongly affected by HIV and AIDS.

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