

### INTRODUCTION

Enabling young children to achieve their full developmental potential is a requisite for sustainable development, but globally 43% of children are still at risk to do so. The problem is grave among the under-privileged rural population in India. Optimum Early Childhood Development (ECD) is hindered by various risk factors, the prevalence of which varies in different communities. Strategy planning for nurturing care depends on evidence-based identification of specific threats to ECD

### BACKGROUND

In our recent cross-sectional observational study through random sample survey of 609 households with children 0-6 years, conducted in rural West Bengal, India, using a MICS III based questionnaire, we identified the following major threats to ECD: **Lack of stimulatory home environment, poor learning opportunities and inadequate responsive parental care, poor maternal education and awareness with poor utilization of available resources** Poverty, over-crowding and poor living conditions were also evident.

#### Detrimental factors detected

#### Deficits in Responsive Parenting

Engage in interactive play. **X**  
Story-telling, singing, reading **X**  
Encourage scribbling/colouring **X**  
Playing outdoors with children **X**  
Permissive parenting **✓**

#### Early Learning Opportunity

Availability of toys: restricted  
Books **X**  
Utilization of resources **X**

#### Home safety hazards

Easy access to hazardous environment **✓**  
Exposure to pollutants, poisons **✓**  
Safety awareness **X**



### OBJECTIVES

Identify the factors influencing Early Childhood Development (ECD) unique to our rural community  
Devise an appropriate and sustainable program to overcome the adversities.

### METHODOLOGY

Selected one county with 8000+ children 0-3 years of age and identified 8 local young girls as Community ECD Activists (CECDA). They were provided 6 days intensive, in-house training on ECD and nurturing care

The CECDA identified mothers of 0-3 year olds in their locality through home visits, conducted a base-line survey on ECD awareness and motivated them to join local mother groups

CECDA held regular mother-child group meetings **4 days a week, 2 meetings a day** (0-1yr and 1-3 year group): 10-15 mothers /group

- 64 mother meets **every week**
- 860 mothers regular attendees.
- 702 meetings held in 5 months

#### Activities at mothers meets

Discuss and interact with mothers

#### Following specified lesson plans

Play based group activities with children & mothers

20 weeks program

DIY activities: home based toys  
Singing, reading, story-telling



### RESULTS

#### Responses from 228 randomly selected mothers to a survey with open ended questions

#### Impact on mothers

##### Knowledge Acquired

Importance of playing with child: 40.35%

Positive parenting : 25.56%

Early learning through play

##### Skills acquired

**Making toys at home** with locally available articles: 62.28%

45.67% mentioned **Telling rhymes** with action and **singing: 45.67%**

**Talking** with the child, **telling stories and reading: 21%**

##### Change of Behaviour at home

**Spending more time** with children 65.1%

Actively **engaging** with the child 51.1%.

**Both parents** playing with child.

#### On children

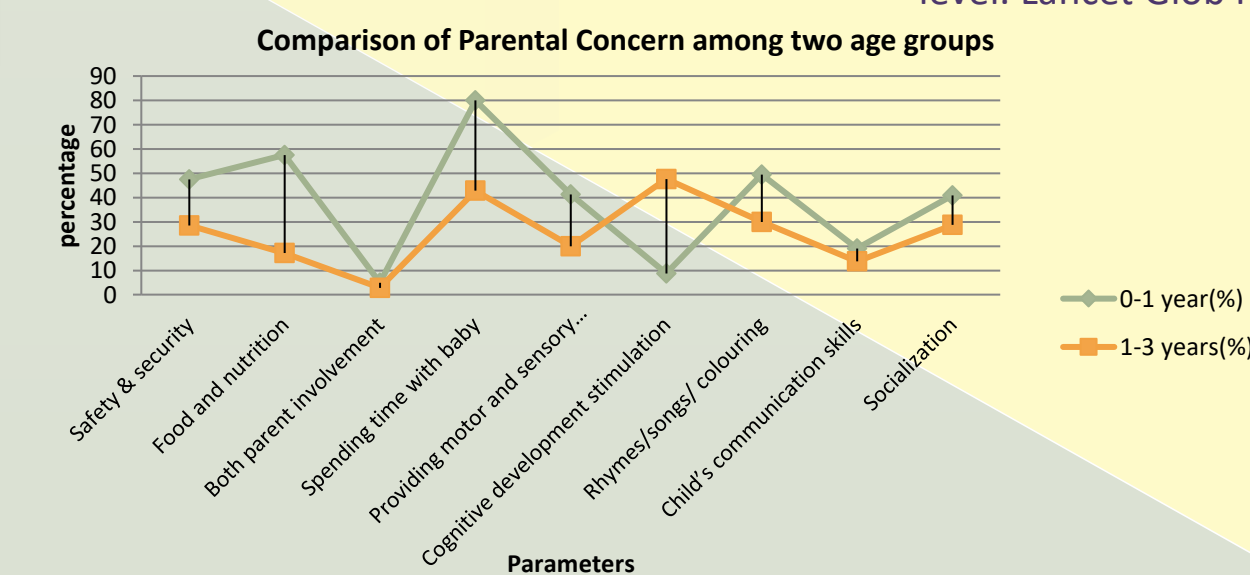
**Better socialization:** 41.2%

**Playing meaningfully:** 28.51%

**New skills, more active, following instructions :** 21.93%

Better **communication** : 17.11%  
Learning to ask questions!

**Happy and enjoying**  
Replicating at home: [23.25%]



### CONCLUSION

**Poor stimulating home environment** and **poor maternal education** were identified as important detrimental factors to optimum early brain development.

**Sensitization and empowerment of parents** by duly **trained CECDA**s through **regular, sustained group activities** is effective in overcoming the adverse factors.

Novelty of this model is that many parents can be reached simultaneously and focused intervention augments parental knowledge and skill. A short exposure of 6 months had brought in significant change in awareness and behaviour among mothers, children as well as other family members.

### REFERENCES

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