



Is cash the answer? Lessons for child protection programming from Peru



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The Juntos (Together) program has the potential to improve children's care and protection

Cash transfers aim to support the poorest and most vulnerable people in society. They provide a regular income (typically monthly or quarterly) that helps to reduce economic vulnerability within the household. They also minimize adverse coping strategies, such as taking children out of school or resorting to distress migration. In many cases, participation in a cash transfer program is dependent on families complying with certain conditions (e.g., ensuring that children get basic health checks, attend school, take nutritional supplements). These conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs also sometimes

require caregivers to attend awareness-raising sessions on subjects ranging from good parenting to basic legal entitlements.

During the past 20 years, middle-income countries – and increasingly, low-income countries – have seen significant investment in publicly funded CCT programs, many of which focus on children. Programs are now found throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, and they are increasingly being rolled out at scale. Brazil's Bolsa Família (Family Allowance) program reaches more than 50 million individuals, Indonesia's cash transfer program supports approximately

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20 million people, and South Africa's Child Support Grant reaches more than 9 million people.

The popularity of these programs is partly explained by the strong evidence base regarding positive effects of CCTs on children's access to education, health, and nutrition services. Much less emphasis, however, has been placed on the role that cash transfers could play in ensuring that children have access to adequate care and protection. With the exception of Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty program, which stipulates that children should not be involved in exploitative forms of labor or human trafficking, very few programs have directly tackled violence against children. Indirect linkages (e.g., awareness-raising sessions for parents; referral to complementary services such as violence prevention or victim support, counseling, legal aid, or birth registration) are also relatively rare.

The lack of focus on adequate care and protection has also been pointed out by Armando Barrientos and colleagues. In a review of CCTs conducted for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2013, they reported that few programs assessed the effects – intended and unintended – of CCTs on children's universally recognized right to care and protection.

This lack of assessment is surprising given the growing consensus among development professionals that deficits in this area constitute a critical part of children's experiences of poverty and ill-being. Indeed, a multi-country study undertaken by Ariel Fiszbein, Norbert Schady, and Francisco Ferreira for the World Bank in 2009 found that although CCTs were successful in increasing children's uptake of basic services, improvements in developmental outcomes were much more modest and, in some cases, absent.

Thus, a focus on CCTs as possible tools for ensuring adequate care for children is still at an early stage, but some – including the authors of the World Bank study – have concluded that more attention needs to be paid to children's nurturing environment within the home and in providing support to tackle key social problems (e.g., violence in the home, addiction, psycho-emotional health).

Two strategies have been developed for addressing these concerns. The first strategy involves helping families by providing one-on-one services. Chile's Solidario (Solidarity) program stands out as a model in this regard. Solidario assigns a dedicated social worker to the most vulnerable families to help them identify and tackle their biggest problems. The program offers a joined-up and tailored package of services alongside regular cash payments.

The second strategy involves simultaneously tackling exclusion and violence at a broader level (i.e., within and between communities). Such an approach can have significant effects on vulnerable groups. It is also considered by many scholars to be a vital component in achieving meaningful change for children's safety and well-being.

Peru's *Juntos* (Together) CCT program employs this broader approach. This article addresses whether the unique features of the *Juntos* program have strengthened the focus on child protection issues as part of a multi-dimensional approach to tackling child poverty and vulnerability. Put another way, this article explores whether the program has been successful in not only improving use of education and health services but also providing protection from violence, neglect, and exclusion.

To accomplish this aim, we draw on a range of program evaluations and a small-scale study we carried out in mid-2013 in the city of Cusco,

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