

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Parenting Practices and Associations with Development Delays among Young Children in Dominican Republic

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Abstract

BACKGROUND According to the World Health Organization, >200 million children in low- and middle-income countries experience developmental delays. However, household structure and parenting practices have been minimally explored as potential correlates of developmental delay in low- and middle-income countries, despite potential as areas for intervention.

OBJECTIVE The objective of the study was to examine associations of developmental delays with use of World Health Organization–recommended parenting practices among a clinic-based cohort of children aged 6–60 months attending in La Romana, Dominican Republic.

METHODS This study was conducted among 74 caregiver-child pairs attending the growth-monitoring clinic at Hospital Francisco Gonzalvo in June 2015. The Malawi Developmental Assessment Tool was adapted and performed on each child to assess socioadaptive, fine motor, gross motor, and language development. The IMCI Household Level Survey Questionnaire was used to assess parenting practices. Fisher's exact test was used to determine associations significant at $P < .05$. Significant variables were then entered into a multivariable logistic regression.

FINDINGS Almost two-thirds of children had a delay in at least 1 developmental domain. Most caregivers used scolding (43.2%) or spanking (44%) for child discipline. Children who were disciplined by spanking and scolding were more likely to have language delay ($P = .007$) and socioadaptive delay ($P = .077$), respectively. On regression analysis, children with younger primary caregivers had 7 times higher odds of language delay (adjusted odds ratio [AOR]: 7.35, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.52–35.61) and 4 times greater odds of any delay (AOR: 4.72, 95% CI: 1.01–22.22). In addition, children punished by spanking had 5 times higher odds of having language delay (AOR: 5.04, 95% CI: 1.13–22.39).

CONCLUSIONS Parenting practices such as harsh punishment and lack of positive parental reinforcement were found to have strong associations with language and socioadaptive delays. Likewise, delays were also more common among children with younger caregivers.

KEY WORDS child development, discipline, Dominican Republic, early childhood, global health, parenting.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 2 decades, mortality of children younger than 5 years in low- and middle-income countries

(LMICs) has decreased by more than half, to approximately 5.9 million deaths per year.¹ Because more of the world's children are living longer, more attention is warranted to assess not only the quantity

Conflicts of Interest: The authors have indicated they have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

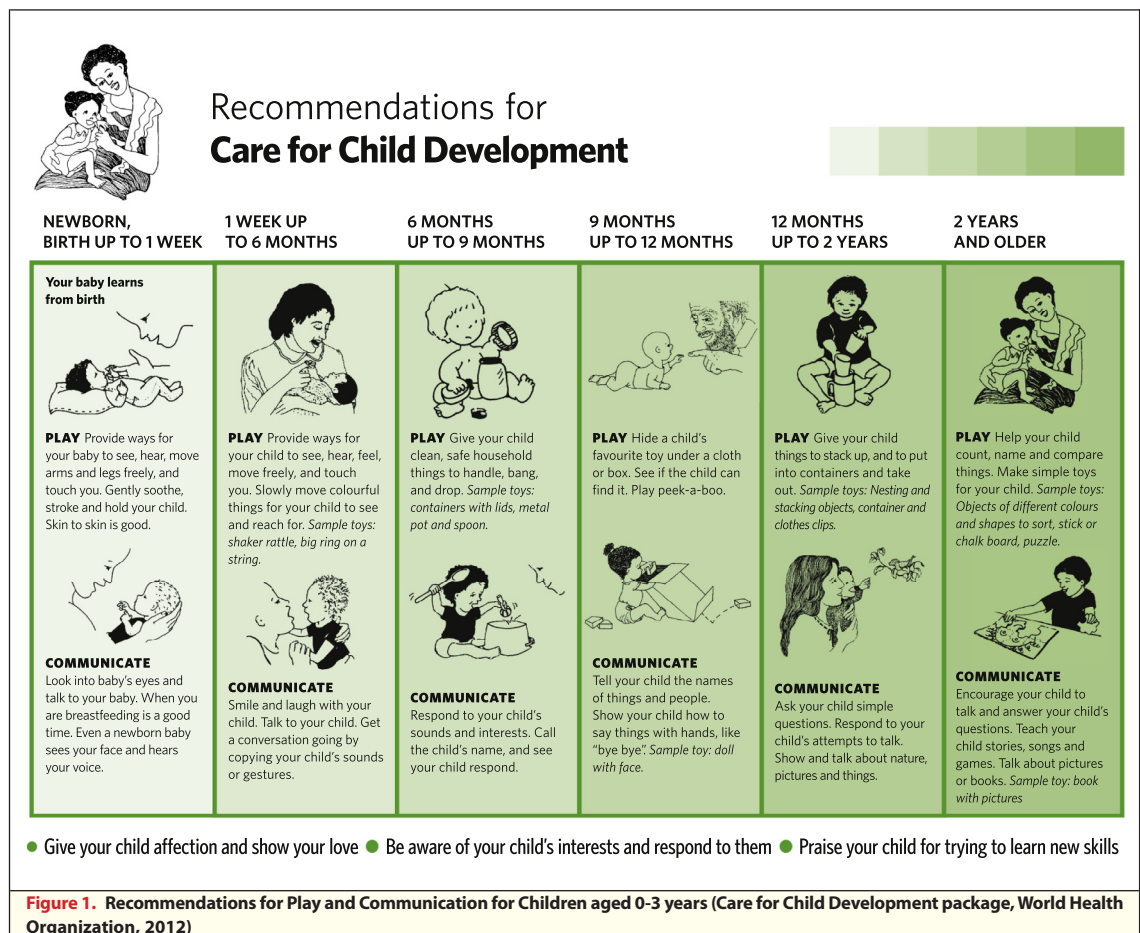
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of young lives saved but also the quality of these young lives, with a particular focus on early childhood development.² The rise in culturally appropriate tools to assess early childhood development in LMICs has increased recognition and has also uncovered the large global burden of developmental disability.³ Moreover, more than 200 million children in LMICs still do not experience their full range of skills and functioning abilities or have delays in development.⁴

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), factors that greatly affect the presence of developmental delays include poverty, stigma, discrimination, institutionalization, violence, child neglect, and scarcity of health services, many of which require large-scale and institutional interventions or changes in policy.⁵ However, parental roles and parenting practices have only been minimally explored for associations with developmental delay, despite their potential as focus areas for family-centered interventions. The examination of these factors is supported by the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Framework for Human Development, which postulates that human

development is most affected by the child's "microsystem," or the relationships and interactions a child has with his or her immediate surroundings (eg, family).^{6,7} In addition, family systems theory also supports the influence of parenting practices as potent determinants of child behavior, such as those used for communication, conflict and discipline, and connectedness or attachment to the child.^{8,9}

To promote family practices for supporting healthy child development, the Care for Child Development (CCD) package was developed in the late 1990s and revised in 2012 by WHO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).¹⁰ The CCD package has been designed as a training manual for health care workers to provide age-appropriate guidance to caregivers of young children for stimulating cognitive, language, and social-emotional development.¹⁰ Specifically, the CCD package provides recommendations for responsive child-caregiver interactions through improved play, communication (Fig. 1), and discipline techniques (not shown). However, the association between caregiver use of these practices and



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