



# A good start: advances in early childhood development



**EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS**



June 2015 / 124

# EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS



**Bernard  
van Leer**  
FOUNDATION

*Early Childhood Matters* is a journal about early childhood. It looks at specific issues regarding the development of young children, in particular from a psychosocial perspective. It is published twice per year by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The views expressed in *Early Childhood Matters* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Work featured is not necessarily funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

© Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2015

Reproduction of articles by photocopying or electronic means for non-commercial purposes is permitted. However, it is requested that the author, *Early Childhood Matters* and Bernard van Leer Foundation are cited as the source of the information. Permission must be obtained to use photos.  
ISSN 1387-9553

Cover: Young African American father holding his baby girl.  
Photo: © iStock.com/sam74100

*Early Childhood Matters* is also published in Spanish: *Espacio para la Infancia* (ISSN 1566-6476). Both publications are available electronically on [earlychildhoodmagazine.org](http://earlychildhoodmagazine.org) and single hard copies can be requested free of charge.

Bernard van Leer Foundation  
PO Box 82334  
2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands  
Tel: +31 (0)70 331 2200  
[www.bernardvanleer.org](http://www.bernardvanleer.org)  
Series editor Teresa Moreno  
Guest editor Joan Lombardi  
Consultant editor Andrew Wright  
Text edited by Margaret Mellor  
Design Homemade Cookies ([homemadecookies.nl](http://homemadecookies.nl))

## Contents

- 5 A foundation for sustainable development: advancing towards a new era for young children and families  
Joan Lombardi

### **Section I Supporting children and families right from the start and throughout the early years**

- 10 Early adverse experiences: what does the latest brain research tell us?  
Johanna Bick and Charles A. Nelson
- 14 Progress and challenges in ensuring healthy births and babies  
Gary L. Darmstadt
- 19 Bridging survival and development in the post-2015 agenda: partnerships in nutrition and early child development  
Aisha K. Yousafzai and Mandana Arabi
- 28 The Jamaican early childhood home visiting intervention  
Sally Grantham-McGregor and Susan Walker
- 35 Partnering with families: improving home visits in Europe and Central Asia  
Deepa Grover and Bettina Schwethelm
- 38 ‘Key success factors are joint management and intersectoral cooperation’  
An interview with Jorge Luis Fernández and Norma Vidal
- 43 Global gains and growing pains: pre-primary education around the world  
Michelle J. Neuman and Kavita Hatipoğlu
- 51 Why men’s caregiving matters for young children: lessons from the MenCare campaign  
Gary Barker
- 54 Parenting in times of war: supporting caregivers and children in crisis  
Katie Murphy, Sandra Maignant, Laura Boone and Sarah Smith
- 59 Special needs, special rights: addressing young children with disabilities via inclusive early childhood development  
Donald Wertlieb and Vibha Krishnamurthy
- 65 *Innovations and initiatives*

### **Section II Capacity building critical to scaling**

- 70 Saving Brains: innovation for impact  
Dominique McMahon and Karlee Silver
- 74 Measuring early childhood development: priorities for post-2015  
Abbie Raikes, Tarun Dua and Pia Rebello Britto
- 78 Quality in early childhood settings: universal values and cultural flexibility  
Dawn Tankersley, Tatjana Vonta and Mihaela Ionescu

- 82 The Early Learning Partnership: catalysing opportunities for young children  
Aashti Zaidi Hai
- 86 How business leaders can support young children  
Sara Watson, Gideon Badagawa and Ruth Musoke
- 88 Developing leadership for young children in Brazil  
Eduardo Queiroz and James Cairns
- 91 ‘The courage to admit to the limits of our knowledge’  
A conversation with Kofi Marfo
- 94 Building early childhood Global Leadership  
Mark Elliott and Lynette Okengo
- 97 Looking back to the future: early human development in 2030  
Mary E Young
- 101 *Innovations and initiatives*



**We now have increasing evidence that investing in young children and families can lead to better outcomes for the current and future generations.** Photo • Courtesy *Asociación Red Innova*

## Why men's caregiving matters for young children: lessons from the MenCare campaign

Gary Barker, Co-Chair, MenEngage Alliance and International Director, Promundo-US, Washington DC, USA



Fathers hold an important caregiving and developmental role, both directly for their children and indirectly as part of a caregiving 'team'.  
Photo • Courtesy Pitt/MenCare campaign

**After years of focusing overwhelmingly on the mother-child dyad, child development as a field has 'discovered' fathers. Gary Barker explains how the MenCare campaign is leading research into why and how to engage fathers, and advocating for changes in public policy and practice in the early childhood arena.**

What role do fathers play in child development? Do children need them? Do fathers play a unique role in generating the conditions children need to grow and thrive? In recent years a number of major and

longitudinal studies have been conducted on the role of fathers, and they reached the overwhelming conclusion that fathers matter greatly for children, and that children matter greatly for fathers.

Specifically, research affirms that:

- 1 fathers matter for child development in more ways than we have historically considered, meaning they matter for diverse areas of a child's life, from emotional to intellectual
- 2 fathers matter over the life cycle of the child and adolescent, and not just in the early years of life

- 3 fathers matter differently for boys and girls in some settings
- 4 fathers hold an important caregiving and developmental role, both directly for their children and indirectly as part of a caregiving ‘team’
- 5 men themselves change in diverse ways, biologically and psychologically, when they take on caregiving roles.

In short, fathers influence child development, and children influence fathers’ development and life trajectory.

In spite of this spurt in research, the early child development field has been slow to turn these findings into programmes and policies, with some notable exceptions. A few important pioneer parent training programmes began to reach out to fathers, and a few countries – notably in Scandinavia – began to take fathers seriously in parental leave policies. But fathers were still usually an afterthought in the field of early child development.

Inspired by conclusions from a 2005 global summit on fatherhood, organised by the Fatherhood Institute and supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Promundo and partner organisations launched the MenCare campaign in 2011. Its goal was to create a global advocacy platform and provide a resource base of evidence-based programming – programming that can and should be taken to scale.

Indeed, rather than a one-off intervention or pilot impact evaluation, the campaign set off with the goal of engaging the public sector. A cornerstone of the campaign has been carrying out targeted advocacy with ministries of health, ministries of education and ministries of child development on the need to involve fathers, and providing ready-to-implement programme tools to do so. These tools are collected in Program P (‘P’ for *paternidade*, *paternidad* and *paternité*), now used in more than ten countries and officially adopted by ministries of health or governments in Indonesia, Rwanda, Brazil, South Africa and elsewhere. The

programme includes activities and recommendations for training public sector staff who interact with families, recommendations for targeted policy advocacy, and parent and father training activities drawn from the ‘best of’ evidence-based parent training.

#### **Lessons learned**

One of the key lessons learned in the process has been the need to do the hands-on training and awareness building within the public sector. A study carried out by our partner NGO in Chile (CulturaSalud) found that healthcare and childcare sector workers who hold traditional views about gender (that women do the care work and men get in the way), are less likely to talk to men and include them, even when the father is there. Similarly, in Brazil, where the Ministry of Health created a ‘prenatal men’s health protocol’ urging health workers across the country to include fathers in prenatal visits, we have supported the large-scale training of health workers. And the results are paying off: more men are coming to prenatal visits and are learning hands-on fathering skills. In short, one of our conclusions is that it matters both that we get the policies on the books but also that those individuals who implement the policies are taking seriously the need to engage fathers.

The other major and perhaps obvious conclusion is that we need not simply to train the public sector but also to change the structural conditions in men’s and women’s lives so that men do more of the hands-on caregiving.

To give an example of these household dynamics and the structural factors behind them, research finds that both mothers and fathers use corporal punishment against children, but data from multiple settings finds that mothers are more likely to use it. Part of this has to do with the fact that women do more of the care work – and thus are more likely to be in daily and constant contact with children. An impact evaluation of a parent training programme carried out by Promundo in Brazil found that while attitudes related to corporal punishment among mothers changed as a result of the intervention, mothers’ rates of use of corporal punishment did not



decline. In qualitative interviews with the mothers, many noted that the lack of support in daily care work by male partners was a factor in their use of corporal punishment. In Brazil and many other settings, mothers, particularly in single-parent households, carry out the majority of caregiving and face economic hardship.

Other studies have found that mothers who have a good relationship with and receive support from biological fathers or other male caregivers, as well as other social networks, have less parental stress and are less likely to use corporal punishment. If we want to reduce household stress, reduce corporal punishment and promote men's involvement as caregivers, we must address the structural factors that too often disengage men from the care of children.

In sum, our evaluation of MenCare training to date confirms that:

- 1 we need to promote men's greater involvement as fathers to reduce the stress on mothers and female caregivers, and
- 2 that it matters how men act as fathers – and it particularly matters if they use violence against their children's mother and against children.

Our work is also informed by our household-level sample survey, research that has found clearly how men's involvement in positive ways as fathers is transmitted from one generation to the next. Boys who see their fathers or other men in the household carry out care work and domestic work, and interact with female partners in equitable ways, are more likely to do a greater share of the care work when they become adults and to be men who believe in and live gender equality. They are also more likely to have happy, fulfilled lives – as are their partners.

#### **The way forward**

It is with these findings that we are embarking on the next generation of MenCare advocacy, focusing on promoting equal, non-transferable and paid parental leave. Partners from nearly 30 countries where MenCare

activities are being carried out are jointly advocating for such leave. We argue that we need governments, employers and workplace policies to support the caregiving of both mothers and fathers, and that we need universal policies to do so.

In short, men's caregiving pays off. It creates equality and well-being in the short-term and it plants the seeds for equality in future generations of boys and girls. And promoting involved fatherhood isn't simply an issue of individual men doing more. Employment and livelihood policies, early childhood development programmes and social services have not caught up with the changes taking place in families around the world, thus making it difficult for men who do want to share caregiving more equally with their partners. The limited evidence suggests, nevertheless, that men may increasingly be realising the importance of their roles in their children's and partner's lives and taking on more caregiving activities. The change is happening. The MenCare partners seek to speed it up.

*'In short, fathers influence child development, and children influence fathers' development and life trajectory.'*