PLH Toddlers programme improves parent- and child-outcomes related to education and violence-prevention

Kaathima Ebrahim
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The nature of the parent-child relationship impacts children’s ability to develop well in their early years.

“The presence of a supportive and nurturing relationship with even one primary caregiver helps children to be more resilient and develop well.”

- Harvard Centre for the Developing Child
The PLH Toddlers programme, called Dialogic book-sharing, improves child and parent outcomes

Let’s see why

What did you observe between the mother and child?

Interactive  Closeness

Easy  Engaging

Exciting  Lively

Inquisitive  Enjoyable

Supportive  Respect

Show me something white on your person. Show me? Do you have something white?
Early “serve and return” experiences maximise stimulation in the language centres

In “serve and return” interactions, meaningful responses from adults stimulate connections in the infant’s language centre in the brain.

Two recent research results:

“Stronger predictor of language and cognitive development than number of adult words heard”

“Greater stimulation of brain areas associated with language processing than number of adult words heard”

Parents need to be supported to have interactions and exchanges during book-sharing with their children, rather than simply reading the words on the page.

Source: Gilkerson et al. 2018. ‘Language experience in the second year of life and language outcomes in late childhood’, Pediatrics, 142(4)
Romeo et al. 2018. ‘Beyond the 30-million-word gap: children’s conversational exposure is associated with language-related brain function’, Psychological Science, 29(5)
Harvard Centre on the Developing Child
Randomised Control Trial of Book-Sharing (DBS) in South Africa

- 91 mother-child dyads
- Infants aged 14 – 16 months
- 8-week programme in book-sharing (n=49) or control (n=42)

Primary outcomes:
- Child Language (CDI)
- Child attention (ECVT)

Secondary outcome:
- Maternal book-sharing

Book-sharing had positive effects on children’s language and attention.

Parent report on infant receptive language – no. of words understands

Parent report on infant expressive language – no. of words understands and can say

Attention i.e.,% time focused on task

Source: Vally et. al.

- Randomised controlled trial, Khayelitsha
- 14 – 16-month-old infants
Children who begin with lowest level of performance improve the most.

Source: Cooper et al
Book-sharing also improves young children’s socio-emotional development...

**Empathy**
% of children demonstrating empathy in a help task

**Imitation of affectionate interaction**
% of children showing behaviour

Source: Murray et.al., 2016
... and helps mothers respond more sensitively and reciprocally with their children.

![Graph showing parental sensitivity and reciprocity during book-sharing](source: Murray et al., 2016)
Training parents and caregivers in the book-sharing programme has the potential to make a significant contribution to both educational achievement and the reduction of aggression through development of more harmonious family relationships and more stimulating engagement.
The “wordless” nature of the books promotes more interaction and engagement between parents and children.

Parent interactions (9 month olds), Mean number of:

Parent and child interactions (27 month olds), Mean number of:

Source: Sénéchal et al., 1995, Early Childhood Research Quarterly
Books without words also promote more adult mental state talk which, in turn, helps children’s mental state understanding.

The group of children who shared books without explicit text had better scores on explaining mental states.

Why do wordless books promote richer interaction?

- The adult has to make sense of the story
- There is an opportunity to tailor the story to the child’s experience
- The adult cannot just ‘fall back’ on a text

Source: Peskin and Astington, 2004, Cognitive Development
How does book-sharing impact violence reduction?

Violent behaviour develops in early childhood

- Majority of research and intervention into gender-based violence has focused on societal and attitudinal factors.

- This work looks at the individual psychological variables that impacts the development of violent behaviour.

Normal child aggression peaks at age 2 - 3

If children fail to learn emotional regulation

And fail to learn adaptive ways to manage aggressive impulses

Leads to persistent and pervasive child aggression by age three-to-four.
An additional benefit: Book-sharing helps improve parents' early parenting challenges to decrease child risk factors for violence

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early parenting difficulty</th>
<th>Resultant child risk factor</th>
<th>Book-sharing benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unresponsive or insensitive parenting</td>
<td>Child is insecurely attached to parent</td>
<td>Secure infant attachment and increased maternal sensitivity</td>
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<td>Harsh or inconsistent parenting</td>
<td>Child behaviour problems</td>
<td>Improved parent containment strategies and reduced child defiance and aggression</td>
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<td>Poor cognitive stimulation and support</td>
<td>Child cognitive problems and education failure</td>
<td>Improved child language and attention</td>
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Significant predictors of persistent child aggression and later violent behaviour

Associated with decreased risk for aggression and later violence
Parents occupy many spaces within society that could be used to support their bonding and stimulation activities with their babies.

We need to support parents in the spaces where they find themselves with their babies:

- Clinics
- Home affairs
- Libraries
- ECD centres
- Religious spaces
- Community-based organisations
Community-based organisations: 4 - 8 week programme

Non-profit organisations

- Book-sharing for Babies - Fathers
  - Four session programme
  - Six session programme
- Book-sharing for Tots
  - Six session programme
- Book-sharing for Young Children
  - Eight session programme

Research studies:
- Murray et al
- Cooper et al
- Dowdall et al

- Group sessions
- 8 – 10 participants
- Weekly sessions
- Themed book per session
- Discussion, practice and mentorship
ECD Classrooms: 4 week programme

ECD Classrooms

- 4 session programme
- Manualised programme with videos and powerpoint slides
- Group sessions of 8 – 10 ECD teachers

Research studies:
- Study on impact of training ECD teachers on teacher and child outcomes
Clinics: Home visitor programme through Community Health Workers

- Home visitors trained to introduce mothers in the First Thousand Days to concepts on early stimulation and book-sharing
- Mothers receive 1 – 4 visits on book-sharing, depending on district model
- Planning with local authorities on implementation approach and delivery mechanisms
- All mothers received 1 book
Libraries: Provide supplementary support to parents exposed to book-sharing through Community Health Workers

- Libraries in Districts where CHWs and clinics are offering book-sharing are also targeted to offer book-sharing
- Ongoing support and mentorship offered to mothers, and other caregivers, on book-sharing
- Libraries stocked with additional wordless books
A story from a parent (1/2)

"When my daughter was little, she would ask me to help her with her reading homework. Most of the time her reading would be in Afrikaans and I can’t read in Afrikaans, so I would avoid her.

After being trained in the book-sharing programme, now with my younger son, I understand that he and I have the freedom to create our own story, in our own words. I am able to learn more about my son and he is able to know me better as his mother."
I used to have the most stubborn child. I would tell him what to do, and it would be like he never even heard me.

I would shout at him – nothing.
I would threaten to hit him – nothing.
I would hit him – still nothing.

But now, when I want him to do something, we sit down and talk about it, and then he does it. Now, I realise that... I was the stubborn one.
Thank you!
APPENDIX
We are also conducting a study to adapt the book-sharing programme for delivery to fathers

**Stage 1:** Adapt existing book-sharing programme for fathers

**Stage 2:** Conduct preliminary evaluation of its acceptability and feasibility
Fatherhood and care work

- Fatherhood is gendered
  
  Women take on 70% of the total care work within home

- Global shift in view of father role
  
  Due to changes in employment structures, family composition, and better understanding of importance of father involvement

- Father engagement is unique
  
  This type of father-child interaction in play is predictive of a long-term, positive impact on the child

Source: Charmes, 2019; UN Women, 2020; Richter & Morrell, 2006
Fathers’ involvement in children’s literacy development

- As contemporary fathers are taking on multiple roles (bread-winner, caregiver, educator) within the home environment, they are engaging more in literacy practices with their children.

- A range of benefits to engaging in early literacy activities:
  
  - Builds secure attachments
  - Strengthens father-child relationship
  - Enhances children’s language, literacy and maths achievement
  - For fathers - experience fewer depressive symptoms

Source: Morgan et al., 2009; Baker, 2014; Downer & Mendez, 2005; Duursma, Pan, & Raikes, 2008; Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002; Pancsofar, Vernon-Feagans, & The Family Life Project Investigators, 2010
Fathers’ involvement in children’s care can lower risk factors for violence

**Improve Care**
- More men involved in caregiving and play
- Enhanced attachment and relationship

**Short-Term Preventive Effect**
- Less likely to enact violence against children
- Child experiences reduced exposure to violence

**Long-Term Preventative Effect**
- Reduce ill-effects of neglects
- Enhance protective role of caregivers in child’s life

Source: Sonke Gender Justice, 2014; International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)
Fathers’ involvement in the early years benefits children’s overall development

- Improved cognitive skills and learning outcomes
  - “…higher IQs, enhanced linguistic abilities”

- Improved psychosocial outcomes
  - “…improved child well-being”
  - “…more confident”
  - “…better social relationships with peers”

- Improved social competence
  - “…better regulation of the way they feel and behave”
  - “…better management of feelings of aggression”

Source: Frank, 2014; Heartlines, 2020; Pruett, 2000; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Allen & Daly, 2007; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Varghese and Wachen, 2016; Lamb, 2002; Mosley & Thompson, 1995
## Research Measures

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<tr>
<th>Fathering outcomes</th>
<th>What will be assessed</th>
<th>How it will be assessed</th>
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<td>How often fathers share books with their children each week</td>
<td>Assessed using the Father Involvement Scale to be completed by both mothers and fathers (Belsky, 1984; Lamb, 1987).</td>
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<td>Sensitivity and Reciprocity</td>
<td>Fathers will be filmed interacting with their child, rated for paternal sensitivity and facilitation, and for reciprocity (Murray et al, 2016; Dowdall et al, 2020). Use of positive parenting (praise) and harsh parenting using Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Essau et al., 2006).</td>
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<td>Gender equitable attitudes</td>
<td>Fathers’ attitudes to gender equality will be assessed before and after participating in the intervention using the Gender Equitable Men Scale (Pulerwitz &amp; Barker, 2008)</td>
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| Child outcomes | Language | Assessed indirectly by father and mother report (using a local adaptation of the MacArthur Child Development Inventory) |
|               | Attention | Assessed with the Early Childhood Vigilance Task (Goldman, Shapiro, & Nelson, 2004). |