Changing fathers’ attitudes and involvement in care and early childhood education

Examples from pilot interventions in India and Serbia
Across the world fathers don’t spend enough time engaged with their children
Can behavior change communications interventions help?

- Interventions that engage the child and guide caregivers in providing stimulation interactions foster child development (Lancet 2017).

- Interventions such as Nadie is Perfecto (Carneiro et al. 2019) involving mother and father have proven impact on home environments, parenting behaviors and child outcomes, which far outlasted the short duration of the intervention. Receiving feedback and positive encouragement signs can increase feelings of ‘doing the right thing’ among parents.

- A 2014 systematic review found 92 parenting programs across 20 countries that involved fathers (solely or together with their wives). Over 50% of the programs were in the US and **11 in developing countries**. There were no robust evaluations of father participation and father impact on child or family outcomes.

- The behavioral channels are still not understood well, particularly as long-term evidence is scant (Carneiro et al., 2018). Lack of knowledge or confidence, biases, and lack of connection to schools are among the most identified barriers (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005).
Serbia Parenting intervention: Strong from the Start- Give them Wings

Education GP, eMBeD, Open Society Foundation, Center for Integrated Pedagogy. Funding by UFGE and SIEF
2017 Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care project by the World Bank: Increase access to quality ECEC services with a focus on children of disadvantaged backgrounds, including supporting young children and families via a communications campaign:

- Increased preschool capacity generated by the project will not bridge all gaps for all underserved children.
- Newly-created capacity will be available only by 2022 (later now).
- Early child stimulation and improved caregiving practices are a low-cost intervention that can support the achievement of the broader goals of the project.

We aim to examine:

(a) the extent to which parenting workshops and communications improve parenting behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge about early childhood development, and whether those changes are reflected in parent-reported child outcomes.

(b) Whether or not father participation in parental training improves fathers’ behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge about early childhood development, and to what extent these changes are reflected parent-reported child outcomes.
Intervention in a nutshell

Who and where:
13 districts (out of 24) across all 4 regions of Serbia.
21 preschool institutions (PI) – at least 1 per district

Intervention:
• 8 weeks of parenting workshop for parents of children age 2–6 years (designed by CIP).
• Delivered by trained preschool teachers from the local preschool institution.
• Teachers are trained and supervised by mentors (educational specialists).
• Each preschool teacher oversees one group of 6-10 families (82 groups total).

Assignment:
Families with children 2-6 years were recruited by participating preschool institutions and randomly assigned to three groups:

C: Will participate later (n=686)
T1: Main caregiver (n=366)
T2: Female & Male caregiver + Male received actionable SMS (n=382)

T1: main caregiver meetings + and received SMS/audio messages
T2: male and female caregiver meetings + Both SMS/audio messages + male caregivers weekly SMS
## Content of the intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODULES</th>
<th>WORKSHOPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal empowerment of children and parents</td>
<td>1. Welfare and resilience: significance for the child and how to achieve them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How to recognize, strengthen and use personal strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Why play is important for a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing children's potential through play, learning and interaction with peers and adults</td>
<td>4. A family environment that is stimulating for children to play and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Successful communication with children - we listen to each other, hear each other and understand each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education with the support and application of rules, instead of punishment</td>
<td>6. We educate today and think about the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. We educate with love and the application of rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. The role of fathers and other male figures in the growth of children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male caregivers from both treatment group were invited to participate in the last workshop.
Weekly workshop schedule

MONDAY
SMS: Introduction to the topic
Audio: Topic definition
SMS: importance of topic and call for action

TUESDAY:
SMS: Reminder of group discussion
Reference to written materials

WEDNESDAY:
Viber: group discussion
Audio: Summary of discussion
SMS: Main message
SMS: for fathers only

FRIDAY:
Audio: Activity suggestion and invitation to share
SMS: Reminder of next week topic
The emotional support you give your child strengthens his self-esteem. Self-confidence, encourage him to be knowledgeable and to learn. You can show unconditional love and support in a simple way. Talk to the child, answer questions and help him to finds answers. Include it in some of your activities (for example repairs, yard cleaning, house cleaning, cooking, procurement, sport). Pick him up, hold his hand and tell him a bedtime story.

Play encourages a child’s development, and you can play an active role in that. Ask your child what his favorite game is and play together. Look in Card Family Games interesting activities that you can try.

What can you change in dealing with a child in challenging situations? Pity it, and for you and the child to be satisfied, for him to learn something new what can he use in similar situations.

Praise a child when he does something good. Watch how your praise encourages him to continue learning and strengthens his self-confidence.

Are you thinking about your parenting style? What makes your relationship with a child special? Maybe it’s different from what his mother does and that’s it ok. If you had to improve something in your relationship with your child, what would it be?

How similar and how different are you from your father or another man who took care of you when you were little (grandfather, uncle, uncle ...): the way you talk to your child; how you educate him - direct, criticize, praise; how you teach him something new; what values do you pass on to him; how you show tenderness and love; how to encourage independence...?

When was the last time you talked to your child? We know that your job and other commitments don’t leave much room but try to spend time with the child every day. The length of time you spend together is important, but it’s more important to have some "your time" when you can dedicate yourself to it without being disturbed by your TV, cell phone, or family. Talk to him and show interest in inclinations, listen to him patiently.

Examples of SMS sent to fathers

- The emotional support you give your child strengthens his self-esteem. Self-confidence, encourage him to be knowledgeable and to learn. You can show unconditional love and support in a simple way. Talk to the child, answer questions and help him to find answers. Include it in some of your activities (for example repairs, yard cleaning, house cleaning, cooking, procurement, sport). Pick him up, hold his hand and tell him a bedtime story.

- Play encourages a child’s development, and you can play an active role in that. Ask your child what his favorite game is and play together. Look in Card Family Games interesting activities that you can try.

- What can you change in dealing with a child in challenging situations? Pity it, and for you and the child to be satisfied, for him to learn something new what can he use in similar situations.

- Praise a child when he does something good. Watch how your praise encourages him to continue learning and strengthens his self-confidence.

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- When was the last time you talked to your child? We know that your job and other commitments don’t leave much room but try to spend time with the child every day. The length of time you spend together is important, but it’s more important to have some "your time" when you can dedicate yourself to it without being disturbed by your TV, cell phone, or family. Talk to him and show interest in inclinations, listen to him patiently.
Materials

The brochure for participants contains additional information that links to the messages they received for each topic and contribute to its better understanding.

Book about us to be filled with the children to talk and learn about the family and ancestors (who they are, what they like, what they do).

Cards Family games is a set of cards with games that encourage learning, research, creation, socializing and fun. They offer parents ideas for concrete application of the content processed in workshops.

A package for children, that includes a picture book, notebook, pencil case, writing and drawing supplies, provided through the Open Society Foundations Project.
## Participation (so far…)

### Treatment groups (first cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average number of group meetings attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Treatment groups (first cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of families with female/male participant in an average group meeting.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Treatment groups (second cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of families with female/male participant in an average group meeting.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Female attend on average more in both groups.
- Fathers participate significantly more in T2.
- All received follow-up calls after not attending.
- Preliminary numbers (intervention is ongoing)
Endline data will be collected in May 2021, after the second cohort completes their workshop (3 months after the first cohort complete it)
Baseline characteristics

- Nimble evaluation, data comes from program registration form.
- ~70% of parents have secondary school or less.
- In most households salaried income is the main source of income.
- Almost all households have a mobile phone and internet access (mostly through phone).
- ~3/4 of the households have only one child younger than 6.
- 20% households the oldest child attended preschool (fewer in the control households).
- Very few households (3%) participated in an educational program in the past.
- Most households chose to attend the program in the Serbian language (97%), The program was also delivered in Hungarian (2%) and Slovak (1%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of households and program relevant characteristics, all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest education of parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school (VET or general)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main source of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from self-employment (excluding agriculture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from other sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no source of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=1 Household has mobile phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=1 Household has PC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=1 Household has TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=1 Household has landline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=1 Has access to internet (aged 0 to 6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of children reported in survey

- 1: 73.2% 72.9% 74.3% 72.8%
- 2: 22.7% 22.4% 22.7% 23.0%
- 3: 4.1% 4.7% 3.0% 4.2%
- =1 Oldest child attends preschool | 39.6% | 17.7% | 20.8% | 23.0% | 0.22    |
- =1 Ever participated in an educ. program? | 3.2% | 4.1% | 2.6% | 2.6% | 0.16    |

Language of instruction of program

- Serbian | 97.1% 96.9% 97.3% 97.4% | 0.90    |
- Hungarian | 2.1% | 2.0% | 2.5% | 2.1% | 0.50    |
- Slovak | 0.7% | 3.0% | 0.8% | 0.5% | 0.04    |

Data are presented as %.
Endline: what we aim to measure (and find)

Disclaimer 1: Phone survey (length and other constraints), Disclaimer 2: No direct measurement of children

Outcome 1: Parental investments and simulation of children (e.g., indices for involvement, time investment in children, playing with and educating children, home environment)
  - Home environment (HOME –SF)
  - Activities that father/mother does with child (FCI)
  - Father/mother involvement questions

Outcome 2: Parenting style (e.g., self-reported disciplinary methods and parenting style, nourishment of children)
  - Nourishment (HOME –SF)
  - Discipline (MICS module)

Outcome 3: Parental attitudes (e.g., stress scale, feelings of importance of preschool)***
  - Stress (PSS-10)
  - Feeling of importance of preschool question

Outcome 4: Child outcomes (e.g., developmental status on the domains of cognition and language, school enrollment, attendance, and readiness)***
  - Early Literacy, Early Numeracy, Executive Functioning, and Social-Emotional (Caregiver report- MELQO)
  - Behavior (SDQ)
India: Fathers’ involvement in child’s nutrition. An online intervention

eMBeD, Quilt.AI
Funding by BMGF
Food shortages and income shocks due to COVID-19 will further stress vulnerable households.

Crucial to protect children’s nutritional status to support future health & human capital.

Parents will have limited mental bandwidth due to COVID-related information/risk management, income shocks, & family care.

Adapting planned campaign “Feed your Family” targeting fathers/husbands seeking to leverage and rebrand the established role of men as providers for the family.

Fathers have more autonomy of action in deciding how family resources (money) will be allocated to children’s food.

In the rural areas especially, majority of the audience online is men, so information and knowledge goes through them first-hand.
Online ‘assessment’: who and what

Conversation on nutrition among fathers not very present, focus is on mothers.

In COVID:

- Fathers time at home had not directly translated to being more involved in making nutrition decisions.
- Searches for resources for mothers are 6,943% more than that for fathers across the whole of India.
- Most father-related searches are related to “how to”
- Women search for food planning and preparation: “food for baby”, “what to feed my child”, “what should my toddler eat”. They make up 61% of the search population, compared to 39% of men. Across both urban and rural districts.
A clear set of ‘personas’

TRADITIONAL CAREGIVERS
“I am doing enough by earning money”
“Women should stay at home and raise the children”
“I am not interested in hearing about nutrition practices / I believe in traditional remedies”

Focus on breaking traditional mindsets
-> increase exposure to accurate information and knowledge

CAREGIVERS IN TRANSITION
“Child care is everyone’s responsibility”
“I will help when I am free”
“I am unsure how to feed my child / I will stick to the role that I am familiar with”

Focus on providing resources to empower
-> make change permanent

MODERN CAREGIVERS
“I enjoy taking up the nurturing role of caring for my child, even in the area of feeding”
“It is my responsibility to help”
“I am well-informed of good nutritional practices”
“I am proud to be actively involved”

Focus on recruiting them as positive role models
-> strengthen their influence on peers
Pilot in a nutshell

**Aim:** To increase father’s engagement in nutrition by offering simple information and concrete actions that fathers can take to support their child’s nutrition

**Intervention:** Messages (short text + image) delivered through Facebook ads (9\textsuperscript{th} – 18\textsuperscript{th} December 2020)

**Study setting and sample:**
- 54 districts in 2 Indian states (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh)
- 1:1 randomization to messages and control arm
- Target fathers of children <2

**Measurement:**
- 5-8 min. surveys of mothers and fathers measuring father’s knowledge, food purchasing behavior, and food recall
  - Baseline (5\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 2020 – 6\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 2020)
  - Endline survey, long/short versions (18\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 2020 – 6\textsuperscript{th} Jan. 2021)

**After implementation**
- Ad reached 10,402,750 people (i.e., impressions on Facebook which records the number of time people saw this ad on their timeline)
- 3,670 partially complete/complete father surveys
- 1,290 completed key questions
- 183 missing treatment status
- Main analysis sample = 1,107
Targeting – Linking personas, barriers & message design

Motivation

Individual Incentives + Social Norms

Caregivers in transition
• Highlight concrete actions
• Link existing responsibilities to opportunities to support nutrition

“More food groups = more brain power for your child. Add a green vegetable to his/her khichdi!”

“Do you want your child to be healthy? Next time you go to the market buy them an egg.”

Modern caregivers

Traditional caregivers
• Individual Incentives: Link nutrition to cognitive development
• Social Norms: Expanding the norm of fathers as providers to include nutrition

“Physical growth is linked to cognitive development. Feeding your child fresh vegetables and animal protein helps them grow tall, smart, and strong!”

Ease

Capability + Opportunity
If you know what your child eats everyday, you can make better decisions about what else to buy. Stay informed!

Impressions: 15374; Likes: 2500

Eggs can be made in many ways - show these recipes to your wife

Impressions: 38630; Likes: 6900

Here are some great ways to make spinach - show these to your wife!

Impressions: 49245; Likes: 7100
Your family counts on you for their health. Buy both eggs and vegetables next time you go to the market.

When fathers buy the right food - the whole family benefits!

Take your child to the market today. Let them choose their favorite fruit and vegetable.
Baseline: What Fathers Should Do

Comparing Responses of Fathers and Mothers to Frequency of What Fathers Should Do
## Baseline: What Fathers Actually Do

### Comparing Responses of Fathers and Mothers to Frequency of What Fathers Actually Do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Fathers Regularly</th>
<th>Fathers Sometimes</th>
<th>Fathers Never</th>
<th>Mothers Regularly</th>
<th>Mothers Sometimes</th>
<th>Mothers Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bathe_dress</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play_read</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edu_self</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help_feed</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepare_food</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchase_food</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bar chart above illustrates the frequency of different activities performed by fathers and mothers, with fathers' responses differentiated by regular, sometimes, and never actions, and mothers' responses similarly categorized.
Baseline: Parents Ability to Recall What Child Ate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>oth_veg</td>
<td>96.67%</td>
<td>97.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>green_veg</td>
<td>98.00%</td>
<td>97.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eggs</td>
<td>98.89%</td>
<td>97.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an_protein</td>
<td>98.89%</td>
<td>97.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mother and Father recall percentages for various foods consumed by children.*
Baseline: What Parent and Child Ate

Prevalence of Parent Consumed a Food Item But Child Did not, last 24 hours

Prevalence of Child Consumed a Food Item But Parent Did not, last 24 hours
Endline intervention vs control

fathers, with controls (N=1107)
Endline: intervention vs control

mothers, with controls (N=1362)
In sum….

We will learn from the Serbia program (soon)

Changing fathers’ behaviors is likely to require interventions that are longer/broader and include:

• An adequate **approach**, including both motivation, opportunity and ability to enact change by fathers.
• A focus on **gender roles norms** and how they are perceived and understood inside the household.
• **Intermediate changes**—self-efficacy, changes in attention or focus, activities normally done by fathers done ‘more’, etc. are promising areas for intervention.
• More **failures**!