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EVIDENCE REVIEW OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) IMPLICATION FOR POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

Introduction

This brief highlights findings from the evidence review that was conducted on **“what works for a two generation approach in different geographical contexts”**. Kulea Watoto (nurturing children) is a 3 year Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funded project that aims to enhance access to quality early childhood care and development for children aged 5 and under in refugee and host communities across Yumbe, Kyegegwa, and Kampala in Uganda. The project employs a unique two-generation approach, aiming to improve outcomes for both children and their caregivers.

The project is implemented by a consortium led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), with sub-awards to four established local partners: Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE), Madrasa Early Childhood Program, as implementing partners, and the Centre for the Study of the African Child (AfriChild Centre) as a research and learning partner.

What is a two generation approach?

The two-generation approach is a programming framework that emphasizes providing comprehensive support and services that address the needs of both parents and children simultaneously (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). This is premised on the understanding that the well-being of children and their parents is intertwined i.e., outcomes for children are closely related to the well-being of their families and caregivers (Mosle & Sims, 2021; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013).

By design, two-generation initiatives intentionally combine intensive, high-quality adult-focused services with intensive, high-quality child-focused programs to improve outcomes for children, primary caregivers, and families. In contrast, single-focus programs attempt to intervene with children directly, with children indirectly via their parents, or directly with the parents.¹ For example, some single-focus programs seek to affect children indirectly, by helping parents learn to care for their children in ways that will promote the children’s development.

¹ Pierre, R. G. S., Layzer, J. I., & Barnes, H. V. (1995). Two-Generation Programs: Design, Cost, and Short-Term Effectiveness. *The Future of Children*, 5(3), 76. doi:10.2307/1602368

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Two-generation programs vary in terms of content of interventions, in the timing, intensity and duration of program involvement, in the modes used to deliver these services, and age of the children they serve.² For instance, some programs target three- and four-year-olds, while others focus on children from birth until school entry, and still, others specify a broader age range, such as birth through eight years. In terms of delivery, programs employ a range of approaches, each tailored to address the specific needs and circumstances of the children and families they serve. For example, some programs, child-focused services are delivered through home visits or in community-based centres, with centre-based programs generally providing more intensive service.³

Methods and approach

The research team conducted a scoping review of literature addressing the research question. The process began with a broad search of all literature relating to the research question, mainly literature focused on refugee contexts in Uganda and other Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). First, we conducted electronic searches of academic and grey literature, using predefined search parameters and keywords. We define grey literature as reports (e.g. research briefs, program evaluation reports, and working papers) not found in academic, peer-reviewed, or published journals. From this large body of work, we then singled out for more careful review papers and reports relevant to the research question. These were systematically reviewed and synthesized to produce a report outlining key findings.

Key findings

There is generally limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of two-generation programs in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Notwithstanding, research and social science theory offer several reasons why two-generation initiatives may be more effective than single-focus programs:



Children's outcomes are intertwined with their home environment. Studies show that child outcomes depend on the home environment, which is shaped by caregiver/parents' characteristics and experiences, such as their own education, employment, income, mental and physical health, ability to handle stress, and ways of relating to each other, their children, and their extended families (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014).



The quality of a child's "proximal" is crucial for his/her development, especially during the early years. Two-generation programs can enable children to experience the combination of two positive proximal environments, rather than just one



Providing parents and their children with coordinated services can help to strengthen the services and reinforce impacts on both parents and children. Parents' improved economic security is linked to improvements in children's home environment (Duncan and Murnane 2011), greater parental engagement in their children's schooling (Crosnoe and Kalil 2010), and stronger parenting skills (Guryan et al. 2008; Kalil et al. 2012), which can in turn lead to improved child outcomes.



Intensive interventions in more than one area of a child's life are essential. Children can bounce back and even thrive in the face of short-term adversity, but their development is likely to be seriously hampered by chronic and cumulative stress, such as the combination of family economic hardship, low parental education, parents' poor mental health among others.

2 Pierre, R. G. S., Layzer, J. I., & Barnes, H. V. (1995). Two-Generation Programs: Design, Cost, and Short-Term Effectiveness. *The Future of Children*, 5(3), 76. doi:10.2307/1602368

3 Pierre, R. G. S., Layzer, J. I., & Barnes, H. V. (1995). Two-Generation Programs: Design, Cost, and Short-Term Effectiveness. *The Future of Children*, 5(3), 76. doi:10.2307/1602368

Differential impacts of two-generation programs

The review identified four factors that may account for variations in the outcomes of ECD programs across different contexts



Intensity of the program. More intensive ECD programs—those with a higher dosage and a longer duration—may be more likely to achieve outcomes for parents and children.



Quality of interventions/services determines the success of the program. This is in relation to structural quality which encompasses observable features such as teacher-to-child ratios, group size and infrastructure; process quality which entails daily interactions children experience for example emotional support, instructional support and classroom management; and system quality which relates to the overall system in which childcare is delivered, including regulations related to licensing inspection and enforcement.



Intentionality which implies purposely and deliberately linking services for both children and parents.



Program modality which entails how the programme will be delivered for instance home based or centre based, groups vis-a-vis individuals. Child cognitive outcomes are significantly improved across both home-based modalities and centre-based programmes that used group settings.

Implications for 2 Generation Intervention Programming

- Contextual Adaptation is key. It is important to adapt two-generational programs to the specific cultural, social, and economic context of the target population.
- Measure and account for outcomes for both children and their parents.
- Aligning and coordination with other actors. This will not only avoid duplication of services but will also promote scalability and holistic interventions.
- Design of two-generation programs should aim to educate children, skill caregivers, and build their social capital and networks.
- Pay attention to type of intervention, program characteristics, adopt a multi-sectoral approach, incorporate nutrition education and behavior change communication, articulate an evidence-based theory of change and adapt a program to context.

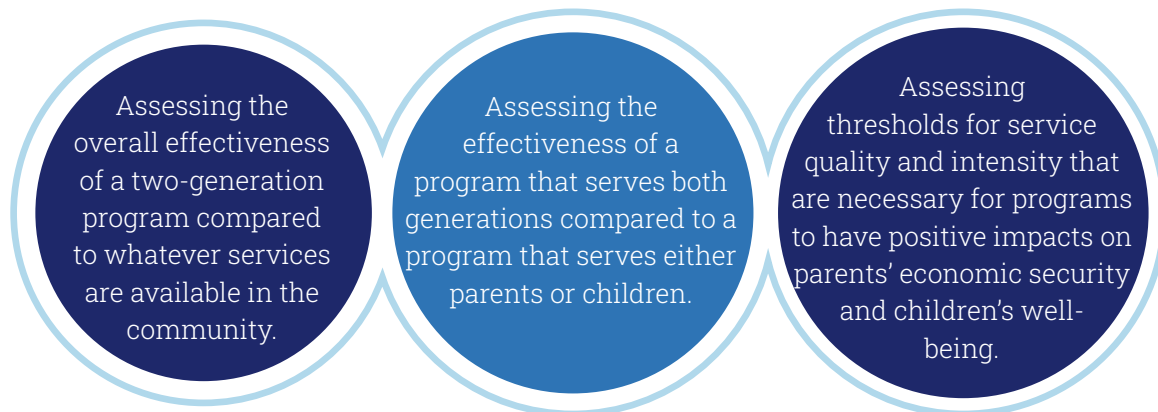
Policy recommendations

- Boost multi-stakeholder coordination among the different actors implementing interventions targeting both parents and children to promote synergies.
- Relevant government agencies and departments need to monitor the interventions that use the two-generation approach to ensure they are of a better quality.
- Government needs to integrate the two-generation approach in the national and sub-national programming, for example, the Uganda Parish Development Model should be more intentional to target both the parents and the children.
- Increase the investment in early childhood development services and economically empower the parents for sustainability.

Opportunities for future research

Given the nascent state of the field and limited empirical evidence, more research is needed both on how best to implement integrated parent and child programs and their level of effectiveness. In addition, existing research does not offer clear definitions for the quality and intensity of services required to improve child and parent outcomes.

Options for effective evaluation include:



References

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