

A Longitudinal Analysis of ECD Program Effects on the Health, Nutrition and Psychosocial Development of Filipino Children

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Early childhood development (ECD) is thought to shape a person's schooling outcomes and lifetime work productivity. On this basis, governments of developing countries and international organizations such as the World Bank have been expanding ECD programs. But there has been little analysis of (1) the impact of such programs in developing countries, in general, and with longitudinal data on individual children, in particular; and (2) how such ECD-related policies affect these outcomes and to what extent policy effects are mediated by family and community background. ECD programs commonly are bundles of different health, nutritional and cognitive development programs for young children, from the post-natal phase through the early schooling years. The multiple dimensions of such programs make it difficult to ascertain their impact or identify the pathways by which they affect children, so measures of the exposure of children to specific changes in aspects of the service provision are important for program evaluation.

The Philippines undertook an ECD program recently in several of its poorest provinces. The authors and the staff of the Office of Population Studies designed an ongoing evaluation for the Philippine government. This paper will analyze unique longitudinal pre- and post-program survey data on children, their families, and service-providers. Baseline pre-treatment data and post-program-initiation data were collected on about 8,000 children, with a stratified random sample design. The data includes longitudinal socioeconomic, psychosocial and biomedical information on children initially aged 0-4, their families and the communities in which they live, all linked to data on service providers.

This paper will investigate the short-run impact on children not only of contact with various ECD programs, but of specific characteristics of those programs, such as the knowledge, aptitude, and behavioral changes of the service providers. The program evaluation measured children's health and nutritional status using standard methods, but also developed and applied an instrument to measure children's cognitive and psychosocial development. The paper will also explore effects of the ECD programs on parental care as children are clearly affected by parental knowledge and behavior. As the program's impacts are mediated by family and community background, the paper will control for how unobserved fixed individual, family and community factors affects estimates of program impacts.

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