



A Case Study of a Fathers' Group Intervention: A Randomised Controlled Trial for Early Childhood Development in Low-Income Households in Alexandra Township, South Africa

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Abstract

Fathers' involvement is a recognised but frequently underutilised factor in promoting early childhood development, particularly in low-resource settings. In South Africa, contextual challenges such as poverty and gendered caregiving norms can constrain paternal engagement. This case study examines a structured intervention for fathers in a high-density, low-income urban township. The purpose was to assess the feasibility and impact of a community-based fathers' group intervention on early childhood development outcomes and paternal caregiving practices. The primary objective was to determine if the intervention improved children's cognitive and socio-emotional development scores compared to a control group. A randomised controlled trial was conducted with 150 father-child dyads in Alexandra Township. Fathers in the intervention arm attended eight weekly group sessions focusing on child stimulation, responsive parenting, and gender norms. The control group received standard community health information. Child development was assessed using the Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development, and paternal engagement was measured through self-reported surveys at baseline and post-intervention. Children in the intervention group showed a statistically significant improvement in cognitive development scores compared to controls. Furthermore, a higher proportion of intervention fathers reported increased daily engagement in play and learning activities compared to the control group. Qualitative feedback highlighted themes of increased paternal confidence and stronger father-child bonds. The intervention was feasible to deliver in a challenging setting and demonstrated a positive impact on key early childhood development outcomes. Directly engaging fathers can be an effective strategy to enhance child development and promote more equitable caregiving. Programme planners should integrate targeted father-inclusive components into existing early childhood development and parenting programmes. Further research should investigate the long-term sustainability of outcomes and the potential for scaling the model. early childhood development, fathers, intervention, randomised controlled trial, parenting, South Africa. This case study provides evidence on the implementation and impact of a father-focused intervention within a low-income South African community, contributing to the literature on gender-transformative approaches to early childhood development.

Keywords: *Fathers' involvement, Early childhood development, Randomised controlled trial, Low-income households, Sub-Saharan Africa*

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