

Inequities in early childhood development: What the data say ^[1]

Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Author: UNICEF

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Excerpts:

This publication, which presents some of the data gathered through MICS3, provides an overview of factors that either support early childhood development or place it at risk. It also reveals inequities in parental care - and in access to early learning opportunities for children - that are associated with household income. The new data, combined with scientific evidence about the developing brain, provide a compelling case for more effective, better resourced and more precisely targeted action on early childhood development. Such action must be spearheaded by national governments and authorities and supported by development partners.

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Accessing early childhood care and education

While the home environment is critical to children's survival and development, care and education programmes are also important if children are to flourish. Quality care both at home and outside the home can provide children with the basic cognitive and language skills they need for school, while also fostering social competency and emotional development. In fact, early childhood care and education make up the foundation of a quality basic education.

A variety of early learning programmes are found worldwide, including those offered through community-based centres, day care facilities, kindergartens and preschools. These programmes may be organized by the state, private institutions or a variety of community-based organizations, including religious groups. Early childhood care and education of good quality can benefit not only young children, but also mothers and other caregivers, whose time is freed up for educational or vocational activities, and society at large.

Yet despite the proven benefits of early childhood care and education, the attendance of children 3-4 years old in any form of organized early learning is low. Evidence from MICS3 shows that attendance in such programmes is 10 per cent or less in a third of countries with available data.

It is well known that investing in early childhood care and education can be a powerful way to reduce gaps in cognitive and socio-emotional skills that often put children with low social and economic status at a disadvantage. Moreover, recent studies show that the returns on such investments are highest among poorer children, for whom early childhood programmes may serve as a stepping stone out of poverty and exclusion. But as with other indicators of early childhood development, data from MICS3 show that here, again, access to such programmes is often denied to the poorest children.

Region: International ^[3]

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