



Strengthening a Whole Child Approach within Residential Care Settings Through Psychosocial Support and Nutritional Guidance

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Abstract

Malnutrition and a lack of sufficient psychosocial support from caregivers both have a tremendous effect on children's development. Initiatives to support healthy child development in a context of poverty include caregiver interventions. There is growing evidence to support interventions that integrate psychosocial and nutritional support. The current study explores a psychosocial support intervention based on the International Child Development Programme integrated with a health and nutritional supplement to child center staff in the Maputo area in Mozambique. A wait list comparison group of staff from other child centers received the same training after the current study.

The study draws on both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to investigate

children's physical health measured through weight and height scores, children's self-report to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire before and after the intervention, and caregivers' perceived changes following the intervention provided through open-ended questions. Measures of weight and height scores (N = 334) from children belonging to the intervention centers showed that 52.4 percent (N = 175) were at risk or at high risk from malnutrition at pre-test of whom 139 were measured again after the intervention. Results suggest improvement among 93.5 percent of the children categorized as malnourished before the intervention. Children's self-reported data on strengths and difficulties (N = 79) suggest significant increases in prosocial behavior in the intervention group.

Caregivers (N = 40) reported strengthened relationships, improved communication, and improved nutritional menus within the intervention centers. Despite limitations due to lack of randomization, adequate comparison data, and longer-term follow-up, this study shows the suitability of implementing integrated psychosocial and nutritional training among professional caregivers responsible for the care of orphaned and vulnerable children.