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Community-based interventions to optimize early childhood development in low resource settings.

Abstract

OBJECTIVE: Interventions targeting the early childhood period (0 to 3 years) help to improve neuro-cognitive functioning throughout life. Some of the more low cost, low resource-intensive community practices for this age-group are play, reading, music and tactile stimulation. This research was conducted to summarize the evidence regarding the effectiveness of such strategies on child development, with particular focus on techniques that may be transferable to developing countries and to children at risk of developing secondary impairments. **STUDY DESIGN:** PubMed, PsycInfo, Embase, ERIC, CINAHL and Cochrane were searched for studies involving the above strategies for early intervention. Reference lists of these studies were scanned and other studies were incorporated based on snow-balling. **RESULT:** Overall, 76 articles corresponding to 53 studies, 24 of which were randomized controlled trials, were identified. Sixteen of those studies were from low- and middle-income countries.

Play and reading were the two commonest interventions and showed positive impact on intellectual development of the child. Music was evaluated primarily in intensive care care care care settings. Kangaroo Mother Care, and to a lesser extent massage, also showed beneficial effects. Improvement in parent-child interaction was common to all the interventions. **CONCLUSION:** Play and reading were effective interventions for early childhood interventions in low- and middle-income countries. More research is needed to judge the effectiveness of music. Kangaroo Mother Care is effective for low birth weight babies in resource poor settings, but further research is needed in community settings. Massage is useful, but needs more rigorous research prior to being advocated for community-level interventions.