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**Timeline**

2021-2022

**Study Status**

Results

**Study Type**

Randomized Evaluation

**Sample Size**

1,408 new and expectant mothers

**Research Implemented by IPA**

Yes

NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

INFORMING MOTHERS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF CONVERSING WITH INFANTS:  
EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM GHANA

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Academic Paper

# Increasing Communication Between Mothers and Infants in Ghana



Animated video shown to mothers demonstrating the benefits of infant-directed speech

**Researchers working with IPA Ghana and the Ghana Health Service conducted a randomized evaluation that showed that a low-cost information campaign in Ghana increased mother-reported conversations with infants, infant language skills, and infant cognitive development. The intervention would cost USD0.45 per child at**

## **scale, making it cost-effective in improving early childhood development.**

Evidence suggests that actively engaging and talking to infants, known as infant-directed speech, leads to stronger language and cognitive development.<sup>1</sup> However, parental engagement in this manner varies across countries and income levels.<sup>2</sup> This may be due to differing expectations of its benefits. In Northern Ghana, only 11 percent of mothers know that children benefit if they are talked to starting at birth.

Researchers working with IPA Ghana and the Ghana Health Service conducted a randomized evaluation to determine whether an information campaign could encourage new and expectant mothers to have more conversations with their infants. The campaign consisted of an animated video shown to mothers at health clinics outlining the importance of engaging with infants and a take-home wall calendar to provide a visual reminder.

The evaluation involved 1,408 new and expectant mothers at public health clinics, divided into two groups: one watched the video and received the calendar, and the other did not watch the video and received an unrelated calendar. Researchers evaluated the effects on mother-infant conversations and infant cognitive development six to eight months later through mother reports, infant cognitive tests, and day-long recordings. Researchers also assessed the immediate effect of watching the video on mother-infant conversations. At the study's end, they randomly assigned 225 mothers from the original no-video group to watch the video and measured the effects the next day via recordings.

Mothers who watched the animated video at the health center reported increased belief in the importance of conversing with their infants, conversation frequency, and infant language skills after six to eight months. There were also suggested increases in infant cognitive test scores and parent-infant conversations from the recordings. Mothers who watched the video only at the study's end spoke to their infants substantially more the next day, with significantly stronger effects than that observed after six to eight months. This suggests that learning about the benefits of infant-directed speech has a strong immediate impact on conversation frequency, improving infant cognitive development, but the effect fades over time. Altogether, the video and wall calendar would cost USD 0.45 per child at scale, making it cost-effective in improving early childhood development.

## **Sources**

<sup>1</sup> Weisleder, Adriana, and Anne Fernald. "Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary." *Psychological science* 24, no. 11 (2013): 2143-2152.

<sup>2</sup> List, John A., Julie Pernaudet, and Dana Suskind. *It all starts with beliefs: Addressing the roots of educational inequities by shifting parental beliefs*. No. w29394. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021.

# Implementing Partner



**Ghana Health Service**