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**Timeline**

2023-2024

**Study Status**

Results

**Study Type**

Randomized Evaluation

**Sample Size**

1,232 ECD workers

**Research Implemented by IPA**

Yes

# Improving the Mental Health of Early Childhood Development Workers: Evaluating the Heal to Grow Program in Colombia



Bogotá, Colombia. Early childhood development worker playing with children. © Lina Junguito, 2023

**In collaboration with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), the Inter-American Development Bank and IPA Colombia conducted a randomized evaluation that found that a mental health well-being program for early childhood development workers significantly improved their social-emotional skills and increased their support for children’s socio-emotional development.**

Early childhood development (ECD) workers are critical in ensuring the integral development of young children, including their socio-emotional development. However, evidence suggests that they experience high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction,<sup>1</sup> which can spill over into their work with caregivers and children.<sup>2</sup> The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare implemented the Heal to Grow Program to improve ECD workers’ social-emotional well-being. In the program, workers attend weekly group training and practice sessions, with content focusing on their social-emotional well-being, social-emotional strengthening of children, and socio-emotional strengthening in the family environment.

In partnership with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, the Inter-American Development Bank and IPA Colombia conducted a randomized evaluation to measure whether the Heal to Grow program improved ECD workers’ social-emotional well-being. The intervention took place in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Bello, and Soacha. A total of 1,232 ECD workers in 632 service units (an early education and care setting or home visit scheme managed by ECD workers) were randomly assigned to either participate in Heal to Grow or serve as the comparison group.

Heal to Grow significantly improved ECD workers’ self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills, but not self-reported stress reduction or mental well-being. In addition, ECD workers increased their strategies to support children in managing their

emotions and identifying their peers' emotions. Among ECD workers who had high attendance at the training sessions, Heal to Grow had a similar impact on social-emotional learning as other interventions in low- and middle-income countries.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> Quinn, Emilee L., Bert Stover, Jennifer J. Otten, and Noah Seixas. "Early care and education workers' experience and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic." *International journal of environmental research and public health* 19, no. 5 (2022): 2670.

Ntim, Seth Yeboah, Jinliang Qin, Collins Opoku Antwi, Michael Osei Aboagye, Siyuan Chen, and Elijah Takyi Mensah. "Early childhood educators' emotional labor and burnout in an emerging economy: The mediating roles of affective states." *Heliyon* 9, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>2</sup> [Näslund-Hadley, Emma and Arias, Elena \(2022\). "How Should Schools Respond to the COVID-19 Mental Health Crisis?"](#)

<sup>3</sup> Oliveira, S., Roberto, M. d. S., Pereira, N. S., Marques-Pinto, A., & Veiga-Simao, A. M. (2021). "Impacts of social and emotional learning interventions for teachers on teachers' outcomes: A systematic review with meta-analysis". *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 677217. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.677217>

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## Implementing Partner



**BIENESTAR**  
**FAMILIAR**

Colombian Institute of Family Well-Being (ICBF)

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# Research and Funding Partner



**Inter-American Development Bank**