Executive Summary

A Multigenerational Perspective on Childcare: A Review of Rigorous Research in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

In recognition of the potential of childcare to improve outcomes for children, their primary caregivers, other caregivers in the family, and the household at large, we conducted a review of rigorous research, synthesizing findings from randomized evaluations of childcare interventions in low- and middle-income countries. Particular attention was paid to the studies that report outcomes for both children and primary caregivers. The review also incorporates insights from qualitative and other studies to provide context and complement the experimental research.

Affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare has the potential to address multiple, widespread challenges faced by families worldwide. Childcare may contribute to economic growth and development by improving early childhood development, increasing female labor force participation, and creating new jobs and businesses. As the babyboom approaches, childcare can provide benefits across two and sometimes more generations of family members.

However, research in policy discussions, and programs often operate in silo, focused on either early childhood development, women’s empowerment. In reviewing ten randomized evaluations of childcare interventions for this review, for example, an estimated two-thirds reported impacts for women, but only one-third considered any outcomes for children. Research from the impact on fathers, grandparents, siblings, and the household relies on evidence from these evaluations.

Additionally, while the childcare workforce and services provided play important roles in the childcare ecosystem, research on their employment, income, entrepreneurship, and other relevant outcomes is limited.

This was an effort to understand an evidence base that is used to inform a range of different programs and policies to improve the well-being and development of children, particularly in settings where the quality of care, the environment, and support for families are critical.
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Childcare for women’s economic empowerment and child development is one of IPA’s Best Bets.