

Setting up for Success to Break Transgenerational Violence: Supporting Positive Parenting Interventions for Caregivers with High Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Scores

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Introduction

Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) are stressful experiences occurring during childhood that directly hurt a child or affect them through the environment in which they live.

Parents and caregivers that have high levels of trauma in childhood are ill equipped to parent their own children because of these ACEs.

In the last 40 years El Salvador has experienced multiple national-level traumatic events. In 2018, the homicide rate in El Salvador (including the disappeared) was 101 per 100,000 people, a death toll higher than that of Syria. The impact of violence is pervasive in El Salvador, with nearly every person having directly experienced multiple traumatic experiences during their lifetime simply by living in the country.

Objective

To 1) improve positive parenting practices and 2) reduce parental perception of stress of the parents in four communities with high incidence of violence in El Salvador through a parenting intervention that incorporates support for parents and their wellbeing.

Literature Review of Successful Interventions

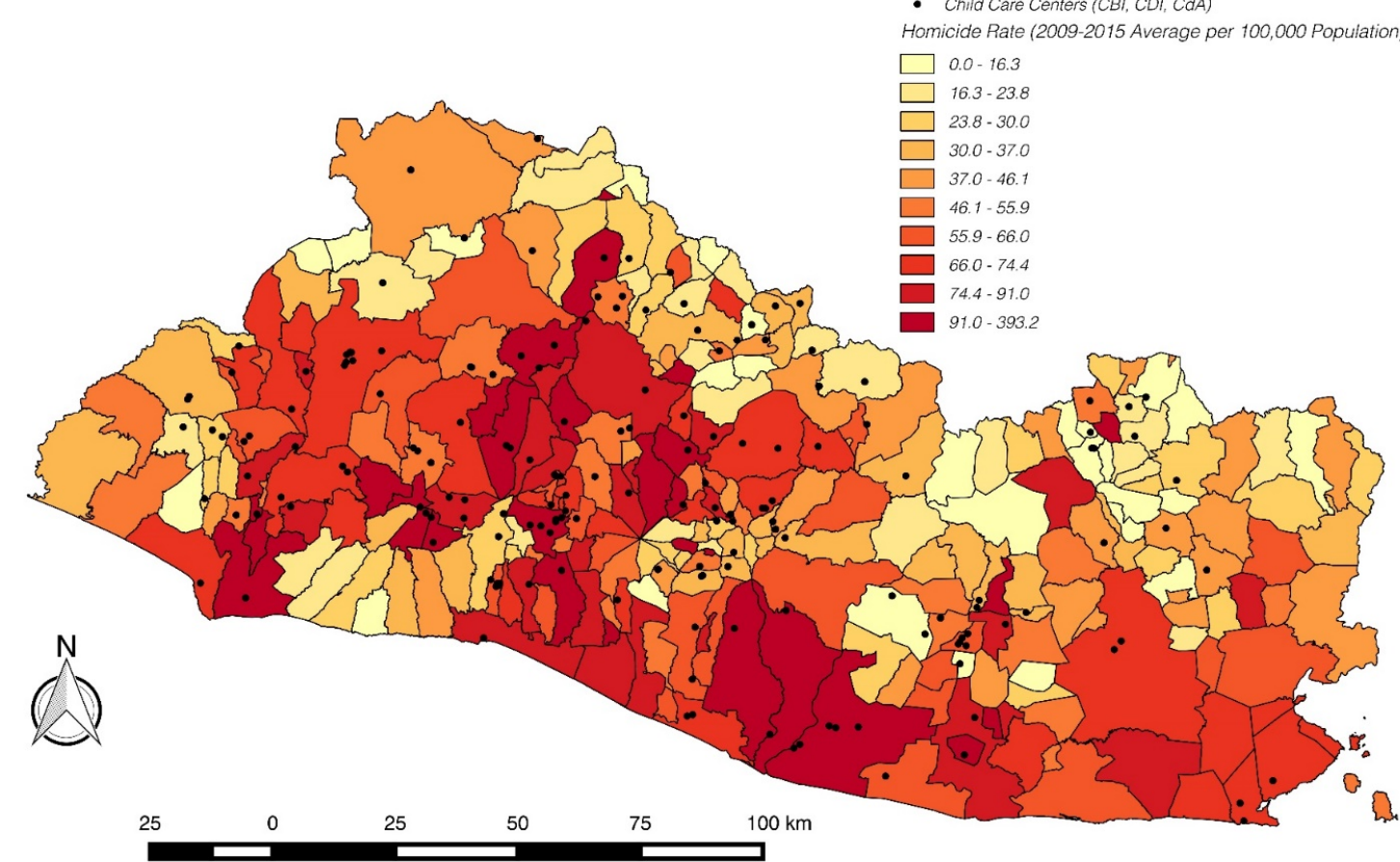
Features of Process

Process related to caregiving and parenting interventions refers to “what” – what topics are included, what information is shared. Four main areas of information were consistently identified as critical to success: 1) improving parental sensitivity in communication; 2) developing a family narrative/identity, 3) supportive use of conflict prevention and resolution skills, and 4) parental stress management.

Features of Structure

Structure related to caregiver and parenting interventions refers to the “how” - how the participant participates, how the group engages, how the program is designed. Five main areas of intervention structure were consistently identified as critical to success: 1) sessions no longer than 3 hours; 2) no more than 5 total sessions; 3) childcare provided on site; 4) practice with feedback; and 5) group support.

El Salvador: Child Care Centers & Municipality-Level Homicide Rates, 2009-2015



Ostermann, Whetten, Barlow, Hobbie, Matza, O'Donnell, Puffer, & Weinhold, 2016

Methods

Sample: N=33 parents of children ages 0-6 located in 4 communities with high incidence of violence in El Salvador

Setting: Four urban and peri-urban communities in El Salvador with high incidence of violence and active gang presence, included in “Plan for a Safe El Salvador” (PESS) and identified through multidimensional poverty analysis by UNICEF as where children are increasingly vulnerable

Measures: Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO); Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Intervention

Three total intervention days (one a week for three weeks)

- Each day focuses on a core topic
 - Communication
 - Identity
 - Positive Discipline
- Each day divided into three components:
 - Early Childhood Development
 - Self-Care
 - Testing new skills with children while guided by mentor

Table 1: Results of PICCOLO parent-child interaction observation scores of parent-child dyads

	BASELINE	POST-INTERVENTION	P-VALUE
Affect (0-14)			
Average numeric score	9.1	11.2	
Average risk score	Moderate	Average	
Matched Pairs t-test			0.000
Responsiveness (0-14)			
Average numeric score	8.7	11.42	
Average risk score	High	Moderate	
Matched pairs t-test	High	Moderate	0.034
Motivation (0-14)			
Average numeric score	7.7	9.9	
Average risk score	Moderate	Moderate	
Matched Pairs t-test			0.268
Teaching (0-16)			
Average numeric score	7.5	8.7	
Average risk score	Moderate	Moderate	
Matched Pairs t-test			0.490

*PICCOLO score range indicated per category in parenthesis next to category name with lower scores indicating increased risk in parent-child relationship and higher scores indicating parenting strength

Results

Improvement of parenting skills was assessed using the PICCOLO at pre and post intervention using a paired-t test (Table 1). Each of the four PICCOLO categories were scored individually with a correlative category related to the numeric score. Only Affect 9.1 average pre-intervention, 11.2 post intervention (p=0.000) and Responsiveness 8.7 pre-intervention, 11.4 post intervention (p= 0.034) were statistically significant.

Reduction of parental stress was assessed using the PSS inventory at five points: pre and post intervention, and each of the three days of intervention. While there was not statistical significance improvement in PSS between intervention days (Table 2), the improvement from 20.77 pre-test to 13.95 post-test was found to be statistically significant (p=0.003).

Table 2 PSS evaluation scores and categories

PSS Evaluation Moment	Average Stress Rating by category	Average score	Difference with Pre-Intervention	Match pairs t-test p-value
Pre	Moderate	20.77		
Day 1	Moderate	20.65	-0.12	0.813
Day 2	Moderate	18.45	-2.32	0.383
Day 3	Moderate	20.65	-0.12	0.813
Post	Low	13.95	-6.82	0.003

*PSS scale is assessed 0-40 with higher scores indicating higher stress

Discussion

Though pre-chosen communities, the characteristics were representative of El Salvador, as was having a caregiver group composed almost entirely of females demonstrative of typical gender roles. The open definition of primary caregiver adult not limited to biological parent reflects the reality that children do not always live with their biological parents due to migration, economic opportunities, and other factors.

There are no known studies to have assessed the level of ACEs on the Salvadoran population, so it is unknown whether a mean 6.6 ACE score is representative of the general population.

Limitations: a relatively small sample (N=33), no comparison group, either within the communities or with comparable communities; participants were self-selecting from four pre-chosen communities.

These findings suggest that parenting behaviors, specifically in the areas of affect and responsiveness, improved over the course of the intervention. The PICCOLO competency areas are tiered by complexity with affect being the first skill, followed by responsiveness, encouragement, and finally teaching. It is reasonable that statistical significance was found in the first two of four levels of skill.

It is assumed, stressors remained constant over the course of the intervention. The results indicate that parental stress decreased, suggesting that, while parents are confronting the same stressors, they may be able to manage those stressors more effectively.

Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed no statistical significance associated with PICCOLO scores across ACE categories.

One-way ANOVA was calculated for site of intervention as related to PSS scores. The analysis was not significant for neither pre-intervention $F(2,27) = 1.349, p = .279$ nor post-intervention $F(3,17) = 1.206, p = 0.337$.



Conclusions

Nearly 70 years of attachment theory and child development research shows that early childhood experiences, especially parent-child relationships, influence how children grow into adults and eventually parent their own children. While stress of any kind impacts parent-child relationships and children’s social-emotional development, high levels of parenting stress are particularly problematic because of their direct influence on parenting behavior and, consequently, child outcomes. Providing parents with the tools to be able to manage stressful situations, as well as the ability to positively engage with their children, is an essential first step to break the intergenerational transmission of ACEs.

Resilience is built through breaking transgenerational experience of ACEs which translates to immediate and long term positive impact on social-emotional and physical health.

Efforts to provide parents with the tools to be able to manage stressful situations as well as the ability to positively engage with their children are essential to break community and family transgenerational experience of violence

Adverse Childhood Events, Trauma, Toxic Stress, Transgenerational Violence, Parenting, methods, interventions, education, child development, affect



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