

Child stimulation intervention fosters early child development in rural Peru

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Children in rural Peru who are stimulated with age-adjusted toys at an early age perform better in categories such as fine motor skills, understanding time and space, or cognitive abilities. The results are published today in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. The community-randomized trial is the first study to assess the impact of an early child development intervention on household level in rural Peru.

Scientists from the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) and the Peruvian Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (IIN) adapted the urban-based Peruvian National Early Child Development Programme (Wawa Wasi) and brought it to the doorstep of people living in the rural Cajamarca region. In a community-randomised trial they showed that children aged 6 to 35 months whose mothers playfully interacted with them for half an hour daily performed up to 23% better in categories such as expression of feeling and emotions, [fine motor skills](#) or verbal and non-verbal communication than the control group. "Our findings are important because we showed that the national Peruvian programme also succeeds in the rural and impoverished areas," says Claudio Lanata from IIN and co-author of the study.

Possible Impact on Poverty Reduction

The findings contribute to the new Early Child Development Programme (Cuna Mas), which is especially tailored to the rural and impoverished regions. Stimulating the human brain at a very early stage in life might

positively affect [child development](#) and might be an effective corrective in [early child development](#) between rich and poor families.

"We hope that these simple and home-based interventions might reduce inequalities between poor and better-off families and give the disadvantaged children a better start in life," comments Stella Hartinger-Peña, co-director of the Swiss TPH - Cayetano Health Research Platform.

Early Child Development as a Prerequisite for Future Health Development

The 509 children in the study were assigned either to the child development programme (258) or received an intervention to improve kitchen- and household hygiene at their homes (251). The children were evaluated at the beginning and at the end of the study for overall performance in seven psycho-motor developmental domains.

"The results have major implications also for future [health](#) research," emphasises Daniel Mäusezahl from Swiss TPH. "Hygiene education and preventive measures against infectious diseases are much more successful if physical, emotional and cognitive development are well taken care of in young [children](#)."

More information: Stella M. Hartinger, Claudio F. Lanata, Jan Hattendorf, Jennyfer Wolf, Ana Gil, Mariela Obando, Magaly Noblega, Hector Verastegui, Daniel Mäusezahl. - Impact of a child stimulation intervention on early child development in rural Peru: A cluster randomised trial using a reciprocal control design, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2016), [DOI: 10.1136/jech-2015-206536](#)

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