



KENYA

“Impact of Early Childhood Development Programs on Women’s Labor Force Participation and Older Children’s Schooling in Kenya”

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Background

About 20,000 ECD centers provided preschool education and day care for more than 1 million children ages three to six (roughly 30 percent in that age group) in Kenya in 1995. A process of rapidly evolving grassroots mobilization and capacity building increased this number to about 26,300 by the end of 2000.

The study “Impact of Early Childhood Development Programs on Women’s Labor Force Participation and Older Children’s Schooling in Kenya” analyzes the effect of childcare costs on household behavior in Kenya. For households with children ages three to six, the study models the demand for mothers’ participation in paid work, the participation in paid work of other household members, household demand for schooling, and household demand for childcare.

Kenya is known for its highly effective, decentralized, community-based ECD programs. Communities are involved in these types of early stimulation programs from the start, and today communities manage about 70 percent of all ECD centers and preschools in Kenya. These programs are started on a “harambee” basis. Through “harambee,” communities provide land; raise funds to construct and maintain physical facilities; provide furniture, materials, and labor; and pay teachers’ salaries. In some preschools, parents and communities have initiated community-based feeding programs and growth-monitoring activities. For feeding programs, parents contribute ingredients and cooking and eating utensils. They either hire a cook or take turns preparing food for the children.

When a community expresses a demand for an ECD center, the government provides technical support and a minimal financial contribution. With the help of local authorities, the community identifies teachers or caregivers, who are then trained by the national government through the National Center for Early Childhood Education (NACECE). NACECE, a semi-autonomous body within the Ministry of Education, has developed a universal training program and preschool curriculum. The community establishes the training center; provides physical facilities such as land, buildings, materials, and equipment; and manages the ECD center. School fees cover the costs to pay teachers’ salaries and school maintenance. A community-elected school committee manages the center and its program. Teachers’ salaries, which are paid by the community, the county council, local authorities, the church, or private organizations, vary widely depending on the source of payment.

The national government is only minimally involved in the management of ECD programs at the local level and rather assumes the role as a regulator and trainer. The communities, local authorities, and parents manage the facilities and are the direct supervisors in terms of the quality of service provided. Communities identify the needs of the programs, and any demand for assistance comes from them.

Kenya's ECD programs predominantly target children three to six years old. However, in many urban areas, arid and semi-arid areas, and plantations, children under the age of three also attend child development centers. Most of these centers run half-day, offering three-hour preschool sessions. Child growth monitoring constitutes an integrated part of Kenya's ECD programs. Nutrition programs, however, are offered only in arid and semi-arid areas. About 25 to 30 percent of child development centers in these areas are owned and run by local authorities, NGOs, and the private sector, and these may remain open until 4 p.m.

The program in Kenya, like that in Colombia, uses a self-targeted approach. NACECE operates as an advocate for preschool activities and offers information, material, advice, and training to communities on how to start and run a preschool. After this initial assistance, the communities are responsible for developing the program further. This self-targeted approach makes it difficult to establish centers that can reach a satisfactorily high number of children from the poorest households. Poor regions with the weakest institutional capacity often lack the skills and resources necessary even to design viable project proposals.

Methodology

The data for this study come from two sources. The 1994 Kenya Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS II) provides information on 10,860 households (59,200 individuals), including 6,624 households with children between the ages of three and seven. The survey is based on a multistage sampling and includes questions on the modes of childcare arrangements made for the children in the household, and the amount of money paid for formal childcare. The part of the questionnaire administered to each individual household member yields data on each household member's labor activity and earnings. Information about childcare facilities was collected by the Kenyan Ministry of Education with the help of the World Bank in 1995. A survey was conducted on a sample of more than 800 childcare facilities in 17 districts or urban centers in Kenya, representing urban, pastoralist, and other rural areas. The Kenya Early Childhood Development Centers Survey is a stratified random sample that represents each of the sponsorship types in the country. The survey collected information on the center's location, enrollment, operating expenditures, financial status, and facilities. Data on the characteristics and salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff, the extent of turnover, and child-feeding practices were also collected.

The data were tested against a simple theoretical framework of household utility maximization that yields empirically testable implications for the relationship between the price of childcare and household behavior. Hypotheses were tested by jointly estimating a system of reduced-form equations of the demand for quality of childcare, schooling for older boys and girls, and leisure of the mother and other household members.

The Main Conclusions of the Study

The estimations reveal that mothers' decisions about participating in the labor market are sensitive to changes in both wages and the cost of childcare. Higher wages

that mothers can earn outside the home encourage them to enter the labor force, whereas higher-cost childcare suppresses maternal employment. Households' decisions about young children's participation in ECD programs are found to be very sensitive to the cost of care. Higher-cost childcare discourages households from using ECD programs. Both maternal wage rates and cost of care affect school enrollment of school-age children. The influence of these factors on a household's decisions about its children's schooling is determined by a combination of income and substitution effects. An increase in mothers' wages raises school participation of boys; in this case, the income effect dominates the substitution effect. But the mothers' wage increase depresses the school enrollment of girls; in this case, girls substitute for the mother in home production. Higher prices for childcare have no significant effect on boys' schooling and significantly decrease the number of girls at school.

The study concludes that a high cost of childcare discourages households from using formal care facilities and has a negative effect on mothers' participation in labor market work. But community-run ECD centers, as an alternative model to formal childcare services, encourage women to work. The results also indicate that the cost of childcare and level of mothers' wages affect older children's school enrollment, but these factors affect boys' and girls' schooling differently. An increase in mothers' wages increases boys' enrollment but depresses girls' enrollment. The presence of ECD centers positively affects enrollment of girls, because as centers provide childcare services, they partly liberate older girls from childcare responsibilities in the household.