

The Power of Play

How can early childhood development be supported for poor children? Nearly 30 years ago, researchers in Jamaica's capital Kingston tried to find out. Follow their journey -- and that of the children they worked with -- below.



Jamaica
1986

Children were 9-24 months old when visits started.

They were stunted from chronic malnutrition.



Mothers were shown how to play and talk to their toddlers.

Visits continued for 2 years



"When I began to visit the homes of children I had seen in the hospital as infants, I realized how little stimulation they were receiving."

*Sally Grantham McGregor,
physician and a member of
the original research team*



Children tracked for 20 years

The children's development was regularly measured & compared with a group of similarly disadvantaged children who didn't receive the intervention.

4
years old

After the intervention, children tested significantly higher on development measurements

7
years old

There were small benefits to cognition, though gains appeared to be fading.

11
years old

Slightly larger benefits to IQ and a tendency for better school achievement.

17
years old

Significant benefits to IQ, reading and self-esteem, reduced school dropout, anxiety and depression.

ages approximate



Around age 22



They were 3 times more likely to have some college education.



They were less likely to have been expelled from school, had fewer physical fights and had less depression.



Average monthly earnings were 25% higher.



Not only were their earnings higher than children who didn't get any intervention, but they had caught up with earnings of non-stunted peers.

The Jamaica curriculum is being adapted and evaluated around the world.

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