

Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW)

Abstract

In 2002, Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF), together with the Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW), launched a parenting project to spread awareness on positive parenting practices in the community, through crèche workers, using the Learning through Play Calendar (LTPC). The project had far-reaching, positive affects in all the selected sites/communities.

Introduction

The Learning through Play Calendar (LTPC) is a parent-friendly, educational resource on Early Child Care and Development. Based on positive trials in the Bala Mandir Crèche and Day Care, BMRF partnered with ICCW, in 2002, to extend the parenting programme and tool to ICCW-run crèches across the country, to reach out to different parenting environments.

The LTPC training programme was an intervention in ICCW's annual in-service training, stressing HOW rather than WHAT activities are conducted. The participants were qualified childcare workers, each with 3 to 15 years of experience in working with children below 6 years.

The key objectives of the project were to:

- Equip the crèche worker with proper knowledge, attitudes and skills on parenting, through the LTPC.
- To promote positive interaction between the crèche worker and (a) the parent, and (b) the child.
- To create a congenial, and supportive atmosphere in the crèche.

Methodology

Location

The programme was carried out in three project areas across Tamil Nadu:

- Chennai: Urban city with slum dwellings. Both parents employed. Acute poverty, social problems, and strong media influences.
- Vellore: Semi-urban. Predominantly Muslim population. High incidence of child labour.
- Usilampatti: Rural. Mothers partly employed in the fields. High incidence of female infanticide.

Schedule

The project was carried out in three stages, comprising training, implementation, and review.

A three-day training programme, based on the LTPC (Birth to 6 Years), was initially conducted by BMRF resource persons, in coordination with ICCW trainers, for over 65 selected crèche workers.

These crèche workers then disseminated parenting messages to the community, through Home Visits, parent meetings, and individual interactions.

The final stage consisted of project review meetings to assess participants' level of understanding on the LTPC, and the extent to which they have been able to share messages with parents, as well as identify implementation gaps, and solutions.

Feedback

Post-training feedback:

- Crèche workers found the LTPC to be a simple and effective tool, and were able to grasp core concepts and learning points with ease.
- Trainees understood the importance of key child development issues, such as brain development, power of play, nutrition, and the involvement of fathers.
- Trainees were keen to use what they had learnt, wherever possible.
- The training helped to improve communication skills with parents, and children.
- There were some gaps in knowledge and formal training on Birth to 2 years, as very few children entered crèches in this age group.

Post-implementation feedback:

- Parents showed a lot of interest in the parenting messages and practices, and were open to suggestions and advice, particularly in the rural areas.
- Problems faced in urban, and semi-urban areas of extreme poverty, domestic violence, poor hygiene, substance abuse, and gender discrimination often contributed to inadequate parenting practices.
- There was a general lack of activities for children, many of whom were tied to a chair or bed, so their movements were restricted.
- Children were not given freedom to play, i.e. in water, or sand, or with household objects.
- Crèche workers highlighted critical concepts to parents, such as the importance of play, and open communication, using appropriate LTPC pictures and messages.

Review & Observations

BMRF-ICCW resource persons conducted reviews in each of the project sites, post the Home Visits and parent interactions. General findings and observations were as follows:

- All communities showed a general increase in awareness, and understanding of positive parenting messages and practices.

- There was a positive change in attitude among parents, and families.
- All areas showed a positive change in awareness and attitude among men. Repeated emphasis on the role of the father has led to men becoming increasingly involved in childcare and household activities, and spending more quality time with their children.
- Crèche workers effectively explained and tackled important parenting issues, with the use of the Calendar. The pictures helped to convey messages to unlettered parents.
- In urban and semi-urban settings, crèche workers had to overcome socio-economic problems/barriers of extreme poverty, domestic violence, poor hygiene, substance abuse, and gender discrimination.
- Interactions with parents greatly depended on the abilities of crèche workers to go beyond the Calendar, by providing extra inputs, and relating messages to the home environment.

Conclusion

The LTPC training project has helped to equip crèche workers with enhanced knowledge and skills on parenting, to take the programme forward into their respective communities. The programme has had a significant impact on increasing awareness and understanding of key parenting messages and changing attitudes, among parents and caregivers.