Child Development and Policy Interventions

We are grateful to the British Academy for generously hosting this event.
Introduction

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What is This Event

• Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC):
  – UK’s largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues
  – Supports independent high quality research which has an impact on business, the public & third sectors

• Festival of Social Sciences:
  – Annual week-long series of free events
  – 12th year, 200 events giving insight into UK’s leading social science research
  – ESRC thinks it’s Important to bring social science research to wider population to inform and foster discussion btw researchers and the wider public/policy makers/third sector

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Who Are We?

- **Institute for Fiscal Studies:**
  - Independent research institute covering broad range of subjects in public policy analysis in UK, Europe and developing countries
  - Producing academically rigorous research to inform policy and public debate as well as contribute to development of academic scholarship

- **Centre for the Evaluation of Development Policy (EDePo):**
  - Research on what policies and programmes are effective at improving the lives of poor people in developing countries?
  - What are the pathways for these effects?
  - Understanding behaviour in order to be able to inform the work of governments, aid agencies & third sector organisations
ECD at EDePo: Motivation

• Motivation for researching development in early childhood (ECD):
  – Early childhood = crucial period for human development so important to get it right.
    • Strong evidence that what happens in early childhood has large and important effects on key outcomes later in life including e.g. productivity, earnings, well-being.
    • A time of heightened vulnerability to negative influences (particularly prevalent in poor developing country settings)
    • Intervention at this age (esp. in poor settings) can have huge lasting impacts on child development and success in later life (bigger than effects of later intervention)

→ We want to understand:

• How do early childhood circumstances and inputs shape later outcomes and how do they interact? How do decisions made by households relate to child outcomes?
• What ECD programmes and policies are most effective at improving child outcomes and why (e.g. how do they affect household behaviour)?
• How to design scalable and cost-effective interventions?
ECD at EDePo: Methods

• Our gold standard main method is evaluation of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT’s).

• Basic principles:
  – Want to know what happens to a child with and without a given intervention to assess intervention impact
  – Impossible to observe the same child in these two states - so use various methods to get as close to this as possible
  – Gold standard = RCT’s:
    • Individuals/households/communities within a study are *randomly* assigned to either receive an intervention or not
    • Since assignment is random can attribute any subsequent difference in outcomes to effects of the intervention
  – Collect relevant data to be able to say not only whether the programme had an effect but how.
ECD at EDePo: Overview of Projects

• Areas of intervention:
  
  – Psychosocial stimulation:
    • training local women to work with mothers of small children from age 12-24 months over 18 months teaching mothers how to play (Colombia, ongoing in India)
  
  – Nutrition:
    • Nutrition education: one-to-one home visits to new mothers by local women focusing on breastfeeding and nutritious diet later on → increase in amount of protein children consumed → increase in height (Malawi)
    • Multiple micronutrient supplements to young children’s diets → no evidence of effects (likely because cause of anaemia was behaviour during breastfeeding period not after) (Colombia)
  
  – Combined interventions: e.g. effects of improving pedagogy and nutrition in nurseries for children from low SES backgrounds (Colombia)

• Cross-cutting questions:
  
  – What packages work best? E.g. comparing effects of separate psychosocial & nutrition interventions with effects of combining these – do the effects of the two components reinforce each other?
  
  – What administration methods work best? E.g. group vs one-to-one visits; professionals vs paraprofessionals
ECD at EDePo: Pipeline

• **Lively Minds (Ghana & Uganda):**
  – Impact of intervention training Volunteer Mothers to run educational play sessions with pre-school children including options to roll-out through pre and primary schools.

• **Colombia (Medellin):**
  – Testing impact of a parenting intervention that has been very successful in Head Start nurseries in Oregon in nurseries in Colombia (Medellin) – pilot showing promising results.

• **Peterborough (more later):**
  – Home visits for children 6-30 months in high risk environments:
    • Can the high returns found internationally be achieved in the UK at scale?
    • How do the benefits map to reduced likelihood of requiring remedial education later on – is this impact enough to cover the full costs of this programme?
Today’s programme

• Session 1: Our work on early childhood - from the womb to pre-school
  – **Gabriella Conti** (Dept of Applied Health Research, Schl of Life & Medical Sciences, UCL)
    • Foetal development: importance for subsequent child development, maternal investments in pregnancy, impact of prenatal interventions (e.g. home visiting programmes for first-time mothers) on child health and development
  – **Orazio Attanasio** (EDePo Co-Director, Department of Economics, UCL):
    • ECD interventions in developing countries: importance, impact, design (community based resources), evaluation (measurement, impact, pathways)
  – **Sarah Cattan** (IFS)
    • Long-term effects of going to pre-school and quality of pre-school on educational outcomes age 16 & future earnings (in UK).

• Session 2: Panel discussion – evidence to practice
  – Chair: **Angus Armstrong** (Head of Macroeconomic & Finance Group at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research)
  – Panellists: **Janet Dullaghan** (Head of Commissioning; Children’s Health and Wellbeing; Peterborough Council); **Carey Oppenheim** (Chief Executive of the Early Intervention Foundation); **Peter Colenso** (Executive Director, Education group, Children’s Investment Fund Foundation)
Housekeeping

• Attendee questionnaires

• Safety

• Look us up: http://www ifs org uk/centres/EDePo/