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**The State of the Evidence: A MegaMap on the Effectiveness of Child Welfare Interventions in Low and Middle Income Countries**

**Presenting Authors**

Howard White1, Ashrita Saran1, Kerry Albright2

**Affiliation**

1. Campbell Collaboration
2. UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, Italy

**Country of residence**

India;Italy

**Objectives/aims**

Despite considerable progress in reducing child mortality, nearly six million under-fives die each year. Millions of children are poorly nourished and go to bed hungry. Quality of education remains poor, and coverage of early child development programmes is still too low. Children are at risk from multiple violations of their rights: child labour, early marriage, violence and sexual exploitation. Disadvantaged children become disadvantaged adolescents and adults, thus perpetuating intergenerational poverty

The evidence base for effective interventions to meet these and related challenges is mostly weak, scattered and too poorly translated to be usable by policymakers and practitioners. Many widely-used approaches are unsupported by rigorous evidence. At the same time, there is growing recognition of the need for an evidence informed approach to funding decisions, programme and project design, and practice.

In 2017, the Campbell Collaboration and UNICEF’s Office of Research-Innocenti therefore began a partnership to co-produce a ‘**MegaMap on Child Welfare in Low and Middle Income Countries’**. The MegaMap aims to provide an intuitive, interactive and visual overview of the state of the evidence (both what is known, as well as where there is little or no evidence) on the effectiveness and impact of interventions aimed at improving child welfare in LMIC’s.

This user-friendly tool, based on evidence and gap map principles will guide policy makers and practitioners towards evidence to support decision-making, help to prioritize global evidence synthesis needs and to quickly identify areas where there is a need to strengthen or scale-up new evidence generation for children (research/knowledge gaps). This tool is being produced as a global public good and has been made publicly available on an online, interactive platform for all those interested in improving the lives of children worldwide. To maximize ongoing relevance and utility for decision-making, it will also be a ‘living map’, updated on an annual basis over the lifetime of UNICEF’s new Strategic Plan (2018-2021)

**Methods**

This MegaMap is based on evidence and gap map (EGM) principles and is a graphical representation of the available evidence for a particular issue. An evidence and gap map informs us what evidence is available. It does not summarize what the evidence says but shows where there is plenty of evidence and where there are evidence gaps. It is shown as a two-dimensional matrix in which the rows are intervention categories and subcategories and the columns are outcome domains and sub-domains. Each cell shows studies which contain evidence on that combination of intervention and outcome, with links to the available studies. Included studies are coded for additional characteristics which can be used in filters, such as country, region and child categories.

This mega-map includes systematic reviews and evidence and gap maps. It does not include primary studies. The primary population of interest for this map of map is children under the age of 18 years. The MegaMap presents evidence for low- and middle-income countries as defined by the World Bank. Upper middle-income countries are included. High-income countries have been excluded. Systematic reviews that have a global focus have been excluded if their focus is predominantly on high-income countries. Those which contain information on high- middle- or low-income countries, but where the findings are clearly disaggregated by region or country and where the findings for low- or middle-income regions or countries are presented separately have been included. This MegaMap contains studies published from 2000 onwards and available in English language only.

The Intervention categories highlighted within this MegaMap are Early Chilldhood Development, Education, Health and Nutrition, Social Work and Social Welfare, Social Protection, Environmental Health including WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), Governance and relevant sub-domains. Outcome categories highlighted include Health Impacts, Healthy Development, Learning and Development, Risk Factor Reduction, Safety, Economic Analysis and relevant sub-domains.

As a companion piece to the MegaMap and in order to enhance research uptake, advocacy and broader dissemination through UNICEF’s global network of 190 offices, five short research briefs have also been produced. These summarize findings from the MegaMap as they relate to the five key goals and supporting results areas under UNICEF’s current Strategic Plan (2018-2021) …

* *Goal One: Every child survives and thrives*
* *Goal Two: Every child learns*
* *Goal Three: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation*
* *Goal Four: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment*
* *Goal Five: Every child has an equitable chance in life*

but are likely to be of wider strategic interest and relevance to agencies and researchers working in the domains of child welfare and child protection in low and middle income countries.

**Main findings**

Phase one of the study found 99 systematic reviews as identified from the 3ie database and 16 evidence and gap maps which present evidence on child welfare in low- and middle-income countries. Phase two of the study (currently underway) will aim to expand the population of the MegaMap through broader searching. This will be completed by end of June 2018.

Interim findings (available as of April 2018) indicate that the largest concentration of evidence is for health and ECD interventions and for health-related outcomes. Intervention categories for which there is little evidence are social welfare and social work (including child protection), governance and environment and WASH. The most common outcomes measured are those related to health, healthy development and learning and development. Few studies measured effects on risk factor reduction. There were very few studies on measuring safety and few studies include economic analysis. Overall, the distribution of maps across intervention sectors is relatively uneven, with health & nutrition and education the sectors with the highest number of systematic reviews and evidence maps. We found little or no evidence synthesis in the areas of child rights, childhood safety, and risk factor reduction.

Out of 16 EGMS, 8 EGMs focus on education interventions and its effect on learning and development with a similar distribution for the health and nutrition sector. 2 EGMs were found on environment and WASH with child welfare outcomes. There were few EGMs in the social welfare and social protection sector. Most sectors in the framework cover a very broad range of interventions, so although there are a relatively high numbers of maps for some sectors, this should not be interpreted as indicating that they have been mapped comprehensively. For example, education is heavily occupied, but focused on traditional education outcomes, and less so on systems/ process issues. There is a lack of evidence on pedagogical approaches. Similarly, in the framework, health is heavily occupied but there is no evidence on mental health issues. There is little or no evidence synthesis on the impact of school-feeding programs, school based health interventions and school sanitation and WASH on the health outcomes of child. Other areas that remain unexplored are in the sub-sector of nutritional supplementation interventions and bio-fortification and its corresponding impact on cognitive development and learning outcomes. There is limited evidence synthesis on management of severe acute malnutrition and its health and learning outcomes, There are very notable gaps in evidence synthesis on the impact of social welfare programmes like birth registration, and child protection programmes such as the prevention of child trafficking and gender based violence and its respective outcomes on health, safety and risk factor reduction.

The preliminary version of the MegaMap, draft report and interim summary are available [here](https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/global-funds/child-welfare-global-fund.html). Final versions will be made available here before GEIS2018 as well as on the [UNICEF-Innocenti](https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1228-internship.html) website and an interactive platform developed in collaboration with the [EPPI-Centre.](https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1228-internship.html)