

# Parenting Programs in Developing Countries:

*Findings from a UNICEF Review*

## IN THIS BRIEF

- 1 Summary and background
- 2 Participants by region and country
- 2 Map of participating countries
- 3 Strategies and service methods
- 3 Types of service providers
- 3 Takeaways
- 4 Further resources
- 4 About the authors



## Summary of research brief

This research brief summarizes results from the *Review of Parenting Programs in Developing Countries* report conducted by UNICEF in 2007.<sup>+</sup> The research results highlight the diversity of parenting programs among developing countries. The brief notes the need for additional research and rigorous evaluation of these programs to better understand their impact on children and families.

## Background

In 2006, 88 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) countries responded to a set of medium-term strategic plan questions by indicating that their country employs a national program promoting good parenting.\* In 2007, these 88 countries were asked 10 questions regarding the details of their national program efforts. Forty programs within 33 countries responded to these questions. Those responses are the source of data for this brief.

More than 5 million families and parents participated in the 40 respondent programs. Table One shows the breakdown of responses by country and region.

**Questions asked of respondents**

1. Please describe the program’s participants (number of participating families, age of children, age of parents, socioeconomic status, etc.).
2. Please describe the program’s content and focus.
3. Please provide a description of the type of services provided and strategies used.
4. Who provides services (nurses, social workers, paraprofessionals, etc.)?
5. Where are services provided (e.g., home, school, health clinic)?
6. Fidelity and adequacy of implementation. To what extent was there a match between program designers’ intentions and what actually happened? Were there aspects of the program that had to be changed because the intended design did not work in practice?
7. What were the goals and desired outcomes of the parenting program?
8. What is the theory or philosophy underlying the program? That is, how is the intervention thought to make a difference?
9. Is there any evidence regarding the program’s effectiveness?
10. What is the program’s starting point (household, community development, etc.)?

*Notes:*

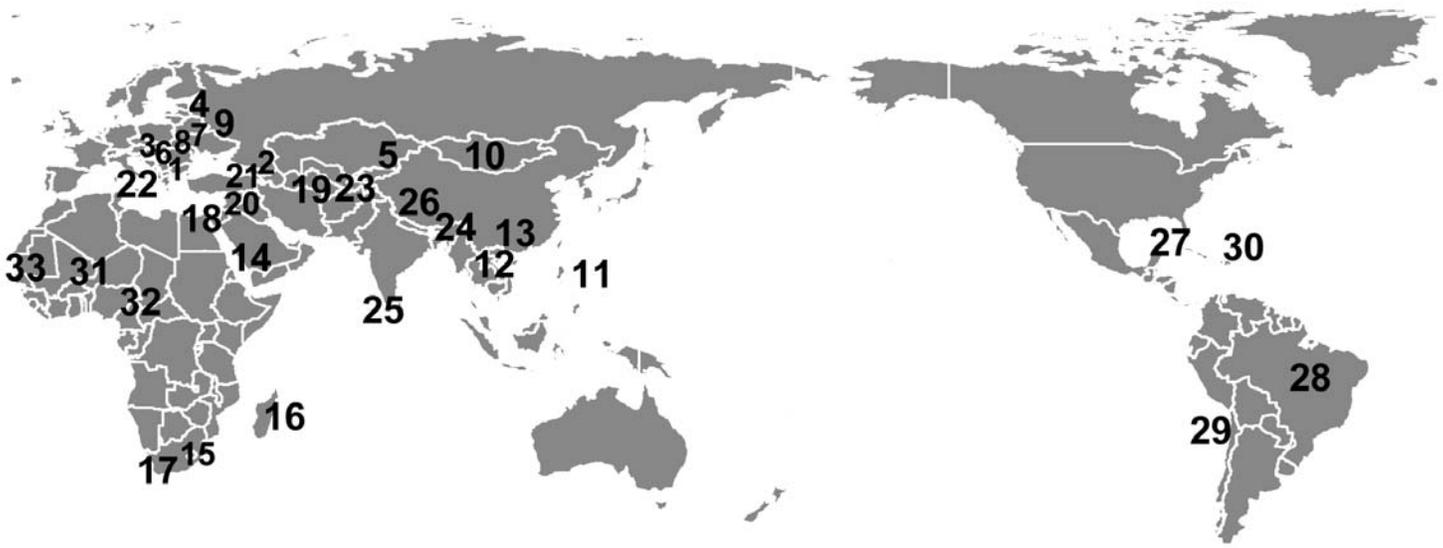
\*Indicates an additional program per country cited

Sequential numbering correlates to the world map below

Numbers of participants across regions might vary due to differences in reporting or strategies used (e.g., direct parent education vs. wide broadcasting in the media).

TABLE ONE: RESPONSES BY REGION	
Region and Country	Family and Parent Participants
CEE/CIS: Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	1,707,699
1 Albania	
2 Armenia	
3 Bosnia and Herzegovina	
4 Belarus	
5 Kyrgyzstan	
6 Montenegro	
7 Moldova	
8 Romania	
9 Ukraine	
EAPRO: East Asia and the Pacific Region	23,275
10 Mongolia	
11 Philippines**	
12 Thailand	
13 Vietnam*	
ESARO: Eastern and South Africa Region	Not Reported
14 Eritrea	
15 Lesotho	
16 Madagascar	
17 South Africa	
MENA: Middle East and North Africa	75,579
18 Egypt	
19 Iran	
20 Jordan	
21 Syria	
22 Tunisia	
ROSA: Regional Office for South Asia	43,490
23 Afghanistan*	
24 Bangladesh**	
25 Maldives	
26 Nepal	
TACRO: Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean	3,152,084
27 Belize	
28 Brazil	
29 Chile*	
30 Haiti	
WCARO: West and Central Africa Region	19,500
31 Burkina Faso	
32 Cameroon	
33 Gambia	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,021,627</b>

**UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S FUND (UNICEF) • 40 PARENTING PROGRAMS IN 33 COUNTRIES**



## Program strategies and service methods

Countries reported using the following nine **strategies and service methods** to facilitate parenting programs:

1. Child development parental education (32)
2. Parent teaching material distribution (16)
3. Healthcare/social worker training and manual distribution (9)
4. Community and mass media campaign initiatives (8)
5. Health and social service referrals and health service delivery (8)
6. Facilities provision and family toys and supplies distribution (5)
7. Survey and study assessments (5)
8. Parental counseling (5)
9. Special needs parental education and service delivery (4)

Regarding the most widely reported strategies, all seven regions used parental education courses on parenting and child development as the primary strategy for service provision. In total, 32 out of 40 programs (80 percent) used this method of service delivery. Sixteen programs (40 percent) distributed parent teaching materials while nine programs (23 percent) provided training and manuals for healthcare and social workers. Another eight programs (20 percent) used community and mass media campaigns to dispense parenting information.

The least reportedly-used strategy was education and service delivery for parents of children with special needs, which was used by only four programs (10 percent).

## Types of program service providers

**Program service providers** included health workers, education workers, social workers, and community members. Out of all programs, education workers were used in 25 out of 40 programs (63 percent). Community members were a primary means of program delivery in 21 programs (53 percent); followed by the use of health workers (50 percent) and social workers (30 percent). These averages differed greatly by region. CEE/CIS, ESARO and MENA predominantly used education workers, whereas EAPRO, ROSA and TACRO used community members for intervention efforts. WCARO was the only region to primarily use social workers.

**Program initiation** at the individual level began in households, communities, facilities such as health clinics and service delivery sites, or at the system level through media campaigns, policy advocacy, and inter-organizational coordination.

- Eighty-nine percent of CEE /CIS programs started in facilities or service delivery sites.
- Fifty-seven percent of EAPRO programs began in communities, facilities or service delivery sites.
- Seventy-five percent of ESARO programs primarily began at the community level.
- Eighty percent of MENA, 43 percent of ROSA, and 80 percent of TACRO programs began in participant households.

**Service delivery sites** varied among home, school, health clinic, and community. EAPRO, MENA, and ROSA primarily provided parenting services and strategies at the community level, while CEE/CIS and ESARO employed a majority of school-based parenting programs. TACRO delivered services in homes, as did WCARO, which equally targeted health clinics.

## Takeaways from UNICEF's review of parenting programs

This research yielded multiple useful takeaways, summarized here:

- First, it is heartening to have evidence that many developing countries are enhancing their focus on child development, not simply on survival, by promoting good parenting. The review highlights that many countries have one or more national parenting efforts.
- There is wide variability in how countries deliver parenting programs. This variability exists in terms of who and what entity delivered the program, program materials, sites, and so on. While the variability is not surprising, this review marks the first time parenting programs have been mapped by direct surveying with each country of interest.
- Countries considering providing a national parenting program might find it valuable to review comparable countries' efforts. For example, multiple countries have implemented media campaigns related to parenting.

Nations considering such campaigns could use this review to inform their own media campaigns or as a resource for alternative system-level initiatives.

- The review further highlights that countries may use different strategies to address similar goals—or similar strategies to address different goals.
- With regard to implications for future work in this area, the review emphasizes the importance of conducting rigorous evaluations to better discern program impact on children and families. Robust evaluations would include random assignment of participants to an intervention or control group and pre- and post-tests to measure knowledge, attitudes, and parenting practices both before and after the program.
- Finally, it is worth noting that a subset of 14 countries studied in this review participated in regional workshops (held in 2007 and 2008) designed to enhance the evaluation components of their parenting programs.

+ Lansford, J.E., & Bornstein, M.H. (2007). *Review of parenting programs in developing countries*. New York: UNICEF.

\*While countries determined their own definitions of “good parenting,” the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been a guiding framework in many early child development efforts within these countries.

## Further resources

Readers interested more broadly in strategies used internationally to enhance positive parenting can consult:

**UNICEF** [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

**Save the Children** [www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

**ChildFund** [www.childfund.org](http://www.childfund.org)

For further information or for the full *Review of Parenting Programs in Developing Countries* report, contact Jennifer E. Lansford ([lansford@duke.edu](mailto:lansford@duke.edu)).

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