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Introduction to the ISSBD Bulletin Special Section: Poverty in Children and Youth — Interventions and Contexts

Around the world, children and young people are more likely than adults to experience poverty and to bear its lasting consequences. Poverty shapes developmental opportunities, access to education and healthcare, and the ability to participate fully in social life. In recent years, economic instability, conflict, and global crises have deepened existing inequalities, amplifying both the prevalence and impact of poverty on children's and youths' well-being and long-term prospects. This growing challenge makes it imperative to understand how poverty shapes developmental trajectories—and how effective interventions can support young people across diverse contexts.

This special section of the *ISSBD Bulletin* brings together contributions from ISSBD members conducting research on poverty and child development in varied cultural and socioeconomic settings. In collaboration with the ISSBD Global Policy Committee, we issued a call for papers on poverty among children and adolescents. The enthusiastic response from researchers worldwide led us to create two special sections in 2025. The first issue (May 2025) focused on developmental mechanisms underlying the effects of poverty; the current issue (November 2025) highlights applied research on interventions and contextual influences.

From Argentina, Lipina and colleagues share decades of pioneering work on executive function interventions for children in socioeconomically deprived households, demonstrating that cognitive and neural development can be strengthened through school-, home-, and computer-based training. In Nigeria, Chiahemba and collaborators examine the mental health consequences of child poverty in Benue State, showing how displacement, conflict, and cultural stigma intersect to affect psychological well-being and calling for integrated mental health and poverty-alleviation policies. In Costa Rica, Durán-Delgado explores caregiving networks in contexts of poverty and migration, illustrating how families adapt caregiving practices under structural constraints and advocating for culturally grounded interventions.

From Türkiye, Çorapçı and colleagues present the *Istanbul95* initiative, which adapts the global *Urban95* framework to support early childhood development among families living in urban poverty through data-driven neighborhood mapping, public space design, and culturally tailored home visitation programs. Their findings reveal improvements in stimulating parenting and children's language development, demonstrating how locally grounded, multi-sector collaborations can promote nurturing care and resilience in disadvantaged communities. Lucassen, from the Netherlands, advocates for an integrated, ecological approach to addressing child poverty—one that extends beyond financial assistance to coordinated, family-centered interventions across systems, fostering resilience and breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Finally, Chigevenga and Zengeni provide a scoping review on poverty and children's mental health in Southern Africa, documenting strong links between socioeconomic deprivation and emotional distress, behavioral difficulties, psychosocial strain, and trauma-related symptoms, and calling for culturally sensitive, multilevel interventions.

Together, these studies illustrate the diversity of approaches needed to understand and address child and youth poverty worldwide. A commentary by Ingrid Schoon, Geertjan Overbeek, and Valentin Ngalim underscores the importance of a global, inclusive developmental science that promotes positive development and thriving for all children and youth.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the ISSBD Global Policy Committee and to the many ISSBD members whose enthusiasm and commitment made this special section possible.

We are delighted to inform you that, starting with this issue, each paper will now have a DOI linked to it. We have been advocating for this development for some time, and we would like to thank the ISSBD Publications Committee, our President, and Sage Publishing for making it possible. This addition will significantly enhance the Bulletin's outreach and visibility, benefiting both our contributing authors and readers.

This issue of the Bulletin, besides the Special Section, also includes reports from recent ISSBD Executive Committee meetings, compiled by Secretary General Luc Goossens, and two heartfelt memorial essays honoring Katariina Salmela-Aro and Robert Serpell—two of our most dedicated members, colleagues, and friends, who will be deeply missed.

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Trajectory through Different Executive Training Interventions for Children from Socioeconomically Deprived Households in Argentina

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Introduction: Brief Historical Contextualization

The neuroscientific and psychological study of how environmental deprivations can affect neural and cognitive development began in the mid-20th century, driven by the implementation of research using animal models of rearing in complex and isolated environments. Accumulated evidence indicates that exposure to differentiated environments (i.e., complex versus deprived) can be associated with changes in different structural and functional aspects of the nervous system, such as: (a) genetic and epigenetic processes; (b) neuronal, glial, and synaptic plasticity; (c) cytoarchitecture of the cerebral cortex (e.g., thickness); (d) hippocampal neurogenesis rates; (e) quantity and metabolism of neurotrophic factors; (f) alterations in different abilities in cognitive tasks with memory and spatial navigation demands; and (g) alterations in behaviors related to emotional and stress regulation (Kempermann, 2019).

Since the mid-1990s, such efforts have expanded to studying how socioeconomic deprivations affect cognitive self-regulatory development (e.g., executive function), both at the neural and cognitive levels, across different developmental stages (i.e., childhood, adolescence, adulthood). Through the implementation of neuroimaging methods and cognitive paradigms, systematic exploration of such processes began, complementing evidence from the application of standardized and academic tasks, which showed lower levels in motor, cognitive, and academic performances related to family low socioeconomic status (low-SES) (e.g., Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; McLoyd, 1998). Living in a low-SES context can be associated with: (a) reductions in volume, thickness, and growth and thinning patterns of cortical and subcortical networks; (b) lower performance on tasks with executive function, language, and associative learning demands; and (c) variation in neural activation patterns during the performance of tasks with language processing, executive function, threatening stimuli, and associative learning demands (Johnson et al., 2016; Noble & Giebler, 2020; Rakesh et al., 2023). Additionally, knowledge advanced regarding how different individual factors (e.g., physiology of stress regulation, inflammatory, metabolic, and cardiovascular activity) and contextual factors (e.g., psychosocial risks, pathogen exposure, environmental contaminants, food security) modulate the association between socioeconomic deprivation, brain structure and function—including cognitive and emotional self-regulation processes (Jensen et al., 2017).

Initially, the interpretation of results from these studies suggested that low performance, along with corresponding structural and functional neural changes, represented deficient forms of processing (D'Angiulli et al., 2012; Frankenhuis et al., 2020). Simultaneously, in the early stages of these research efforts, there was no clear evidence about the possibility of modifying such supposed impacts at neural and cognitive levels, both in the context of typical expected development and in the impact of socioeconomic deprivation. The progressive effort to design, implement, and evaluate the impact of interventions aimed at analyzing the plasticity of these neural and cognitive systems began in the 2000s and continues to evolve today. Accumulated evidence from experimental and quasi-experimental designs suggests that it is possible to modify neural resources and cognitive performance associated with cognitive and emotional self-regulation in children and adolescents living in low-SES contexts through the implementation of different types of interventions. While the magnitude and duration of such

changes depend on different individual and contextual factors, as well as the dose, frequency, and type of proposed activities (Diamond & Ling, 2019; McDermott et al., 2023; Muir et al., 2023), the main conceptual change that progressively emerged is that the impact of SES deprivations does not necessarily represent fixed deficits, but may also represent forms of neural, physiological, emotional and/or cognitive adaptation that still need to be elucidated in future research efforts, considering the potential modulation of multiple individual and contextual factors (D'Angiulli et al., 2012; Frankenhuis & Nettle, 2020; Noble et al., 2021).

Contributions from the UNA

The Unidad de Neurobiología Aplicada (UNA), based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was one of the research centers that contributed efforts to both analyzing the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on executive function and its possible modification through interventions. From the second half of the 1990s, a series of studies were conducted at UNA to examine the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on performance in tasks with executive function demands in children between 6 months and 5 years old. The results of these studies on the impact of socioeconomic deprivation verified: (a) lower performance in most cognitive tasks (including attention, inhibitory control, working memory, flexibility, and planning demands), with variations depending on age and the specific context (district); and (b) the modulation of such associations by family composition, maternal age, child health risk factors, literacy activities, children and adults at home rate, computer resources, parental occupation, housing conditions, social resources, mother language, past preschool attendance, and fathers' level of education (Fracchia et al., 2020; Hermida et al., 2019; Lipina et al., 2004, 2005, 2013; Prats et al., 2012, 2017; Segretin et al., 2014). In the following sections, we describe the intervention studies conducted at UNA (see design details and a summary of results in Table 1).

School Intervention Program (PIE)

Based on the results of previous studies in children aged 3 to 5 years, and drawing on accumulated evidence in developmental psychology from multimodal intervention studies implemented with populations of children from low-income households (e.g., Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Reynolds et al., 2004), a first question we addressed was whether plasticity would lead to behavioral changes following a multimodal intervention in Argentina. The aim of this first intervention study (i.e., PIE) was to optimize executive function performance in 3- to 5-year-old children from low-SES households (Colombo & Lipina, 2005). Between 2002 and 2004, an RCT design with a module of individual cognitive training was implemented. The results showed that cognitive executive performance may be modified by interventions based on exercising in tasks with such demands, in samples of preschoolers from low-SES households, implemented in the school context. This means that the self-regulatory cognitive processing systems involving executive function continued to exhibit levels of plasticity that could be mobilized through individual interventions. In some cases, such changes reached performance levels comparable to those of children living in households without poverty (Martelli et al., 2007). What was evident in 2025 was not apparent at the beginning of the last decade, which led to low performance levels being associated with narratives that supported the hypothesis of a permanent cognitive deficit due to poverty.

Cognitive Stimulation Pilot Programs (PPECs)

The results obtained with the PIE encouraged us to develop a new cognitive training intervention (i.e., PPEC) that also targeted executive function in children from low-SES households, but reduced the number of human resources necessary to carry out the activities. Specifically, by comparing individual versus group modalities, we addressed a scalability research question: whether the number of trainers can be reduced while achieving similar effects. In 2005, we implemented a quasi-experimental design with individual and group cognitive activities in two districts of Argentina (Salta and the Province of Buenos Aires). Results showed that, for both districts, 4-year-old children who participated in both intervention modalities demonstrated an increase in their initial performance on tasks that required attention, working memory, and planning. Four-year-olds who participated in the group modality in the Province of Salta exhibited higher post-intervention performances in the planning task compared to the individual modality group (Segretin et al., 2007, 2016). This study demonstrated that both individual and group training can lead to improvements in executive function performance in preschool-age children from low-SES households. In this case, such results were achieved within the context of group activities conducted in classrooms through teaching activities, with the support of governmental agencies interested in transferring scientific knowledge to policymaking efforts.

Curricular Intervention Program

Based on the positive results of the group training modality in the PPECs, our next aim was to explore whether executive function training could be packaged into regular kindergarten activities. To achieve this, in collaboration with educators, we implemented a curricular adaptation to stimulate executive function through teaching activities conducted by teachers in their classrooms. In 2007, researchers from UNA met monthly with educational researchers to design a set of 64 activities for 4- and 5-year-old children, specifically 32 activities for each age range (16 for math and 16 for language). The criteria used in the design of the activities were: (a) adaptation to the current curriculum of the City of Buenos Aires, (b) use of a playful format, (c) progressive increase in executive function demand and novelty, (d) structure of each activity in sections (i.e., introduction, development, closure), and (e) the format of the activities made it easy to identify which executive function was being primarily trained. The results showed improvements in the performance of some children on tasks requiring inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and fluid processing. Complementary, a 32-session intervention group in one school performed better on an attentional control task, and one year later, had better grades in math, language, and self-regulatory behavior (according to their teachers' assessments) (Hermida et al., 2015). These results suggest that, with this curricular adaptation, the immediate effect on cognitive self-regulatory processes was lower than that of the previous

Table 1. Intervention Studies by Design, Sample, Settings, Activities, and Summary of Results.

	Intervention study						
		PPEC's			Computerized activities		
	PIE	Study 1	Study 2	Curricular adaptation	Study 1	Study 2	Dyadic play
Design	Experimental	Quasi-experimental		Quasi-experimental	Experimental		Experimental
Sample	Low-SES 3-5 yo n=745	Low-SES 4-5 yo n=382	Low-SES 4-5 yo n=288	Low-SES 4-5 yo n=247	Low-SES 5-6 yo n=111	Low-SES 4-5 yo n=119	Low-SES 5 yo n=45 dyads
Setting	Schools (n=3) C. Buenos Aires Years: 2002-2004	Care-centers (n=16) C. Salta Year: 2005	Care-centers (n=4) P. Buenos Aires Year: 2005	Schools (n=2) C. Buenos Aires Years: 2009-2010	Schools (n=2) C. Buenos Aires Years: 2008-2009	School (n=1) C. Buenos Aires Years: 2017-2018	School (n=1) C. Buenos Aires Years: 2012-2013
Study Length	3 years	1 year	1 year	2 years	1 year	2 years	2 years
Modality	Individual	Group, individual		Group	Individual		Dyadic
Intervention	*Multimodular* Cogntive Training (board games) Nutritional supplement (iron, folic acid) Teacher training Parental counseling	*Multimodular* Cogntive Training (board games) Nutritional supplement (iron, folic acid)		*Unimodular* Math/Language school activities with executive function demands	*Unimodular* Computerized games with executive function demands		*Unimodular* Free and structured instructed play activities
Control	Free drawing	Not implemented		Official curriculum	Commercial games		Free play
Intensity	16 weeks per year 16 weekly sessions (1 year) 25 bi-weekly sessions (1 year) 32 weekly sessions (2 years)	16 weeks per year 25 bi-weekly sessions (1 year)		16 weeks per year 32 bi-weekly sessions (1 year)	10 weeks per year 27 bi-weekly sessions (1 year)	12 weeks per year 12 weekly sessions (1 year)	14 weeks per year 14 bi-weekly sessions (home/school) (1 year)
Results	IG, improved performance (A, IC, WM, CF, P), dose effect	Salta/P. Buenos Aires: Individual/ group modalities, 4yo, improved performance (A, WM, P) Salta: Group modality, 4yo, improved performance (P)		IG (school 3), improved performance (IC, CF). IG (school 1), improved performance (A, FP), higher grades language/math/self-regulation behavior in first grade	IG, improved performance (A, IC), higher grades language/math	(a) IG, baseline low-performers, neural changes (N2, functional connectivity); improved performance (A, IC). (b) IG, baseline high-performers, neural changes (N2, ERN, theta power); improved performance (A, P, FP)	IG, improved performance (A, IC, WM)

Note. SES: socioeconomic status; yo: years-old; C.: City; P.: Province; IG: intervention group; A: attention; IC: inhibitory control; WM: working memory; CF: cognitive flexibility; P: planning; FP: fluid processing; N2: negative component 2; ERN: Error-Related Negativity; EEG: electroencephalography.

interventions. In addition, attributing higher grades entirely to the kindergarten intervention requires further study, as the design was quasi-experimental.

Interventions with Computerized Activities in School Contexts

In 2008, a new intervention was designed, consisting of computerized activities targeting executive function, through software that constantly adapted the difficulty to each child's achievement. The primary goal was to expand knowledge about the types of activities that could leverage the plasticity of cognitive systems to promote their development, and to evaluate whether this could be achieved in various ecological contexts, such as schools or homes. In 2011, the software was implemented in two public schools in the City of Buenos Aires, with a sample of first graders from low-SES households. Results showed that children in the intervention group experienced a greater decrease in response times on tasks requiring attention and inhibitory control, as well as higher grades in language and mathematics, as assigned by their teachers, particularly for children with low school attendance, a finding that warrants further exploration and eventual confirmation in future studies (Goldin et al., 2014). Using the same software, between 2017 and 2018, we developed and implemented a new version of the intervention that was adaptive to the individual baseline performance. We addressed two new research questions: whether training individualized according to baseline achievement was more effective and whether behavioral changes had a detectable neural correlate. Results revealed significant neural and cognitive training effects (Giovannetti et al., 2020, 2021; Pietto et al., 2021, 2023). These changes varied depending on the initial performance level (high or low) and the specific cognitive task assessed. In summary, computerized interventions were effective in optimizing neural and cognitive performance in tasks with cognitive self-regulatory demands among children with specific characteristics. The inclusion of a neural level of analysis enabled a deeper exploration of individual differences that may be sensitive to the intervention's impact, particularly in relation to baseline performance levels. This contributed to expanding the diversity of potentially useful intervention activities to promote children's cognitive self-regulatory development at different levels of analysis, making them plausible to implement in ecological contexts.

Promotion of Cognitive Development through Dyadic Play

In 2012, we designed and implemented an intervention aimed at optimizing executive function skills through parenting practices in families from low-SES households, to address the research question about how these practices could influence executive function development. Forty-six dyads of mothers and their 5-year-old children, who attended a public kindergarten in the City of Buenos Aires, participated in the intervention. In each of two consecutive years, dyads were randomly assigned to two groups: (1) intervention, which participated in activities to promote parenting skills and cognitive processes; and (2) control, which participated in general information and free play activities. Results showed that the intervention group scored higher on tasks that required attention, inhibitory control, and visuospatial processing (Prats et al., 2017).

Discussion

The lessons that emerge from the accumulated experience in the intervention studies implemented by the UNA are the following:

(1) Neural functioning and performance levels associated with tasks with executive function demands in children between 3 and 7 years old from low-SES households can be modified by different types of intervention approaches: individual and group training, curricular adaptations, computerized activities, and dyad (i.e., mother-child) play activities.

(2) When a design to assess the dose effect was implemented (i.e., PIE), we found that more exposure to training and sustained bonding with the experimenter in the control group had effects on executive performance.

(3) The modalities in which the implementation of the activities is carried out by teachers may require more time and control of the reliability of implementation, compared to the modalities in which the activities are implemented by researchers or through computerized systems.

(4) Neural and cognitive impacts can be modulated by at least the following individual and contextual factors, which may vary between districts and historical times: baseline performance, housing conditions, social resources, parental occupation, family composition, maternal physical health, age, the number of training sessions, and school attendance.

(5) Not all participants exhibited significant changes, which implies the need to explore varied designs based on the differential characteristics of samples and intervention modalities.

(6) Regarding the duration of these changes, we have only been able to verify their maintenance in one study, for a period of 6 months (i.e., PIE), which implies the need to invest efforts to explore this aspect in future studies.

(7) We have only verified the far transfer to academic achievement in one study (i.e., computerized training), although a similar trend was suggested in another study (Hermida et al., 2015), which implies the need for more studies to improve the knowledge of this aspect.

(8) Finally, the importance of this body of evidence in conceptualizing the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on executive function during childhood consists in that: (a) mere exposure to deprivations does not imply fixed or immutable effects on neural and cognitive plasticity; (b) there would be no early critical periods that once finished would close all opportunity for neural and cognitive plasticity associated

with self-regulatory development; and (c) the design of interventions should consider individual and contextual variations to explore how different activities can benefit different groups of children (Lipina, 2021; Noble et al., 2021).

In the future, this type of effort requires not only continuing to innovate in the design of intervention modalities that consider individual and contextual variability, but also the ecological validity of activities, the role of different physiological systems (i.e., immune, metabolic, hormonal and sleep), the development and validation of analytical methods that allow identification and grouping of children with different intervention needs, and the evolution of their effects over time. Regarding intervention design, it is also necessary to continue debating their scientific and social objectives, that is, why and what is sought to be modified in each cultural context. In other terms, the proposal to promote cognitive self-regulation to anticipate developmental trajectories adaptable to a notion of adult productivity typical of WEIRD contexts could be a topic of interest and/or priority for some cultures but not for others (Mousavi et al., 2024; Rakesh et al., 2025; Zelazo et al., 2024). Beyond this debate, interventions can also be understood as potential avenues for generating opportunities and reducing inequities, particularly in populations facing socioeconomic disadvantages. Despite the structural origins of inequality (Zengilowski et al., 2023), in non-WEIRD countries, the urgency of the crisis requires immediate, pragmatic interventions using available options, even if they are not definitive solutions. In this sense, proposals aimed at emphasizing cultural specificities should consider: (a) different sources of biases in the construction and communication of knowledge about childhood and interventions (e.g., geographical origin of samples, scientific publishing system, structural economic barriers, and developmental paradigms and assessments); and (b) approaches that emphasize culturally constructed conceptions of childhood, integrative frameworks of development, decolonial orientation, and valued local practices (Segretin et al., 2025).

Finally, from the experience of building this type of evidence in an LMIC country during the last two and a half decades—which implies having traversed several economic and social crises that affected knowledge construction work in this area, due to the periodic discontinuation of funds and resources—we have learned that diversifying samples, innovating in design, and implementing long longitudinal designs requires the creation of international collaboration instances. This would not only contribute to addressing the needs required by future efforts at the local level, but also to building a broad and inclusive developmental science that can overcome the limitations of universal conceptions of developmental phenomena that have systematically demonstrated their diverse and variable nature (Barbot et al., 2020).

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Causes and Effects of Child Poverty on Mental Health in Benue State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Mental health is an integral part of health; as the saying goes, there is no health without mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1948) has defined 'health' as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This illustrates that mental health is an important aspect of health and, as such, affects all aspects of a child's life, productivity, and quality of life. Therefore, mental health challenges among children due to poverty are a global concern. An estimated 333 million children (1 in 6) are living in extreme poverty, which has numerous effects on the child's physical and mental health, affecting the family, society, and the government (UNICEF & World Bank, 2023).

Child poverty refers to the state of children living in poverty and applies to children from poor families and orphans being raised with limited or no state resources (UNICEF, 2021). Children experience poverty when they don't get the nutrition, water, shelter, education, and health care they need to survive and thrive. Child poverty is a serious developmental challenge in Nigeria, significantly affecting children in downgraded and underserved regions such as Benue State. According to a report by *Punch Newspaper* (2024a), 51% of Nigerian children live in multidimensional poverty, lacking access to essential needs such as education, nutrition, clean water, and health care services, which aligns with UNICEF's (2021) definition of child poverty. Also, according to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) and UNICEF (2024), 4 in every ten Nigerian children under five years are stunted due to malnutrition due to poverty. These deficiencies have significant consequences not only for bodily health and development but also for the mental well-being of affected children.

According to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (2024), roughly 27.9% of children across 112 countries were multidimensionally poor, meaning they lacked basic needs beyond income. This figure is more than double the adult poverty rate of 13.5%. In the context of the MPI framework, this translates to 584 million children among the 1.1 billion people globally living in multidimensional poverty (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index [MPI], 2024). The global effort to end extreme poverty by 2030 is projected to be lost, partially due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered setbacks in child poverty reduction efforts.

A significant portion of Nigerian children face severe deprivation: approximately 67.5% of children (aged 0–17) live in multidimensional poverty, and about 11 million under-five children suffer from severe food poverty (UNICEF, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] et al., 2022). These figures underscore a severe crisis in health, education, and living standards for children, particularly in rural areas where rates can exceed 90%, and highlight the disproportionate burden of poverty borne by children, as they constitute 51% of the country's multidimensionally poor population, which Benue children are at risk (Punch Nigeria, 2024a).

Benue State has a high incidence of poverty, which is driven by multiple interlinked factors, including economic volatility, agricultural dependency, poor infrastructure, insecurity from farmer-herder clashes, and limited access to social services (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023a). Additionally, harmful cultural practices and weak policy implementation have further deepened child vulnerability. These structural inequalities expose children to chronic stress, social exclusion, and trauma, which are key risk factors for mental health disorders among children.

The emerging evidence indicates that children living in poverty are more susceptible to anxiety, depression, behavioural disorders, low self-esteem, and cognitive impairments (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). In many rural communities of Benue, mental health services are either non-existent or inaccessible, while stigma surrounding mental illness prevents early diagnosis and intervention (Mpem & Mase, 2024; Chiahemba et al., 2024). Notwithstanding the international and national commitments to reducing poverty and improving child welfare, over an estimated 70% of children in Benue live in multidimensional dearth, lacking access to basic needs such as education, healthcare, nutrition, clean water, and adequate shelter (UNICEF, 2023), which is a core concern.

Causes and effects of child poverty on mental health are crucial for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development. This paper seeks to explore the underlying factors causing child poverty in Benue State, which will enhance the psychological and emotional impact on children. The findings aim to inform evidence-based interventions and

policy responses that prioritize child protection, mental health support, and socioeconomic empowerment, which will bring about the overall well-being of the child for immediate and future development of self and society.

Causes of Child Poverty in Benue State

Benue State, Nigeria, faces significant challenges in poverty and development. The state's GDP per capita is $952, with a poverty rate of 39.9% as of 2018, with limited basic amenities, with 73.1% of households lacking access to improved drinking water and 43.81% without proper sanitation facilities (Yio, 2023). The causes are as follows:

The Persistent Crisis: Persistent crisis worsens child poverty by creating long-term exposure to chronic stress, which rewires brain development and leads to impaired cognitive function, emotional dysregulation, and difficulty with decision-making. The Yelewata crisis on 13th June 2025 is a confirmed impact as reported by UNICEF on 17th June 2025, detailing the crisis as triggered by a deadly armed attack in the Yelewata community of Guma Local Government Area, Benue State. The attack resulted in over 200 deaths and the displacement of more than 3,000 people, including over 500 children. Meanwhile, more than 1000 children have been displaced, and the UNICEF has been providing humanitarian aid, including temporary shelters, providing water and sanitation, and offering psychosocial support to the displaced population, many of whom are now in the Ultra-Modern International Market IDP Camp in Makurdi (UNICEF, NHSR, 2025).

Benue State is located in the north-central region of Nigeria and is primarily agrarian, having suffered from persistent underdevelopment, according to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (2023b). This stress also compromises physical health through poor nutrition and lack of healthcare, and traps children in generational poverty by reducing educational attainment and future employment prospects. This reality manifests acutely in children's lives, depriving them of access to basic needs such as food, clean water, shelter, quality education, and healthcare (Yio, 2023).

Harmful Cultural Practices and Beliefs: In some communities, large families are seen as a sign of wealth and social status, but the children lack support and hence, the parents cannot afford to provide basic needs. Other practices include early child marriage and gender-based discrimination. These challenges exposed the children to living and possibly hard labour, where children are sent to work instead of going to school. Instead of providing for the child, the child has to provide for the family (Yio, 2023).

Limited Access to Education and Healthcare: In some communities and traditional perspectives, a girl child is viewed as an asset to the family, where the parents intend to spend less and gain more. Such mentality in some communities in Benue state impacts children greatly, and for them to break free from poverty becomes a challenge. Also, health facilities are either non-existent or under-resourced, making preventive and curative services inaccessible to many families.

Economic Instability: The economic instability in Benue State, Nigeria, has contributed to child poverty through limited access to basic necessities, which has exacerbated the issue (Omeje et al, 2020). The instability has encouraged child labour and deprived the child of basic needs, which may hinder the child's development tomorrow. This instability directly affects children's nutrition, education, and access to healthcare.

Inadequate Policy Implementation: Non-policy implementation has become a challenging factor despite Government initiatives. Poverty remains widespread, with 81% of rural households living below the poverty line, which can be traced to ineffective implementation of poverty alleviation programs (Jato, 2016). While Nigeria has child-focused policies, including the Child Rights Act, enforcement at the state and local levels remains weak. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of political will often hinder progress (Jato, 2016).

Why Poverty Affects Children's Mental Health

Living in poverty affects the whole family, but the impact can be profound and long-lasting on the child (Conger et al, 1994; Masarik & Conger, 2017). Families experiencing financial difficulties, daily tasks can be stressful on the parents while affecting the child's thoughts, behaviour, and mood, which are the parameters of mental health (Sánchez-García et al. 2023). Where the parent is unable to provide such support, the child ends up taking a caregiving role, which can result in poorer mental health for the child (Wang & McLeroy, 2023; Xu et al., 2025). Poverty can affect a child's mental health by creating a stressful environment capable of exacerbating mental health challenges. These issues can be best explained using the stress-diathesis model.

The stress-diathesis model posits that mental health outcome results from the interactions between an individual's vulnerability and environmental stressors, where poverty, chronic stressors such as financial insecurity, inadequate housing, and limited access to basic resources can overwhelm a child's coping mechanisms, as shown in the study (Monroe et al, 1991). It further shows how poverty-related stress leads to alterations in brain development and functioning in the area of emotion regulation and memory. Also, the vulnerability of children to mental illness is high due to the susceptibility to mental health issues as a result of genetic predisposition, inadequate parental support, and limited access to mental health services (Goforth et al., 2010).

The psychological toll of poverty on children is profound and far-reaching. Several studies have documented a strong correlation between childhood poverty and adverse mental health outcomes (Xu et al., 2025; Aviles et al., 2024; Haynes et al., 2020). Children growing up in poverty are at heightened risk for anxiety, depression, behavioural problems, low self-esteem, and cognitive impairments (WHO, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). In Benue State, where public mental health services are scarce and stigmatization of mental illness is high, many affected children remain undiagnosed and untreated.

According to Punch Newspaper (2024b), the Governor of Benue State, Rev. Fr. Alia, stated that the "Save the Benue Child" project is not just a response to these challenges but a commitment to action with the aim of building a comprehensive, holistic support system for children at risk. He points out the "inadequate

access to education, healthcare, to the harsh impacts of poverty and neglect, these young lives are at risk, "calls for concern, and a demand for international, national, and local attention.

The model emphasizes that genetic predisposition alone does not determine outcome. It's the interaction with environmental stress that activates or exacerbates mental health conditions (Zuckerman, 1999). For example, a child with a family history of depression may remain healthy in a nurturing environment. But in poverty, where stress is high and support is low, that same child may develop depressive symptoms. This interaction is supported by research in developmental psychopathology, which shows that adverse environments can activate latent vulnerabilities (Taylor & Francis, 2020).

Risk for Development and Society

The implications of child poverty extend beyond individual suffering. A generation of children deprived of education, health, nutritious food, and protection undermines the future of society at large (Punch Nigeria, 2024a; UNICEF, 2024). These children are less likely to escape poverty as adults, more likely to suffer chronic health issues, and may be at heightened risk of engaging in antisocial behaviours or falling prey to exploitative networks (Punch Nigeria, 2024a; Business Day, 2022). The intergenerational transmission of poverty thus becomes a significant barrier to sustainable development in Benue State and beyond, especially where public spending on children remains critically low (UNICEF, 2025). This places Benue State and Nigeria at high risk if nothing is done.

Debates about Poverty Reduction

A child-focused poverty reduction program in Benue State must combine immediate relief with long-term development. Building on the 2025 EU-UNICEF-ILO SUSI initiative in Makurdi, the program begins with targeted cash transfers to vulnerable households with children, especially those displaced or living with disabilities. Nutrition interventions are vital, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. Community-based growth monitoring, treatment for malnutrition, and maternal care are paired with school feeding programs sourced from local farmers to create a nutrition (livelihoods) loop. Education support includes fee waivers, remedial learning, and safe school infrastructure such as gender-segregated latrines and menstrual hygiene kits. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) integrated to reduce disease burden, with borehole repairs and school handwashing stations (UNICEF, 2025; European Union et al., 2025). Governance led by the Benue State Ministry of Humanitarian and Social Welfare, with coordination across health, education, and planning sectors. Digital systems for payments, grievance redress, and beneficiary tracking should align with national social protection frameworks (Benue State Planning Commission, 2024).

Challenges in Providing Mental Health Services

Cultural Stigma and Misconceptions: Mental health issues are often misunderstood and stigmatized, especially in rural communities where most of the children are exposed to poverty. Many families interpret symptoms as spiritual afflictions or punishment, leading them to seek help from traditional or religious healers instead of medical professionals, which further causes damage to the child's mental health. Children exhibiting behavioural or emotional distress may be subjected to harmful practices like isolation, beatings, or even imprisonment, which may further worsen their conditions due to cultural stigma and misconceptions.

Impact of Displacement and Trauma: Over 159,000 children live in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps due to violent conflicts, especially herdsmen attacks, which have greatly affected Benue State. These children face prolonged exposure to trauma, loss of parents, and lack of stable caregiving, which severely affects their emotional and psychological development. A good example is a child Luper who lost her only mother and siblings in the Yelewata attack, only to be left alone at the mercy of the neighbours. Sixty days later, he became aggressive, demanding to be taken away from the camp. This explains the impact other children may be experiencing. More so, many suffer from PTSD-like symptoms, anxiety, and depression, but have no access to professional care.

Shortage of Mental Health Professionals: Nigeria has only one psychiatrist per 100,000 people, and Benue State reflects this national shortage. Most primary care centres lack trained personnel to identify or treat mental health conditions in children. This results in many children never receiving any formal diagnosis or therapy, which is a major challenge.

Cultural Factors in Child Poverty Interventions in Nigeria

Interventions in Nigeria, whether in health, social work, or development, must navigate a complex landscape of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition, with over 250 ethnic groups, creates a rich but challenging environment for implementing effective interventions. Cultural beliefs, traditional practices, and communal norms significantly influence how individuals perceive and respond to external support, particularly in areas like healthcare, mental health, and social welfare (Isokon, 2020). For instance, maternal health interventions often face resistance due to entrenched cultural and religious structures. Women's health-seeking behaviours are shaped by beliefs in spiritual causation, reliance on prayer houses, and limited autonomy in decision-making. These factors can hinder access to formal healthcare services and promote the use of traditional remedies, which may not always be safe or effective.

Similarly, mental health interventions are complicated by widespread stigma and cultural misconceptions. Mental illness is frequently attributed to supernatural causes or moral failings, discouraging individuals from seeking professional help. This cultural framing necessitates interventions that are not only medically sound but also culturally sensitive, integrating traditional beliefs with modern psychiatric practices to improve outcomes (Opara et al., 2024). Ethnicity also plays a pivotal role in shaping social work interventions. Nigeria's history of ethnic tension and federalism has fostered deep-rooted divisions that affect national integration efforts. Social work must therefore address these divisions by promoting unity-in-diversity and tailoring interventions to respect ethnic identities while fostering collective well-being (Saba, 2024).

In summary, successful interventions in Nigeria require a culturally nuanced approach that respects local beliefs, engages community structures, and adapts to the socio-cultural realities of diverse populations. Ignoring these factors risks alienating target communities and undermining the effectiveness of well-intentioned programs.

Recommendations

Poverty Reduction Programs should be expanded to include conditional cash transfers that incentivize school attendance and regular health check-ups. Mental Health Services for Children must be integrated into primary healthcare systems, with special training for community health workers on child psychology. Educational support should include school feeding programs, learning materials, and scholarships for the most disadvantaged, and community engagement through awareness campaigns on the mental health effects of poverty and the importance of nurturing environments.

Also, to accelerate actions to prevent, detect, and treat severe child food poverty and malnutrition, the Child Nutrition Fund (CNF), which was launched in Nigeria with support from UNICEF and other partners, should be implemented to help end child malnutrition. The researchers joined UNICEF to urge the Government of Benue State, donors, and financial partners to prioritize practices to end severe child food poverty and malnutrition.

Conclusion

Child poverty in Benue State is not just a socioeconomic issue; it is a crisis of human dignity and potential. The link between poverty and mental health among children reveals the urgent need for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond charity or welfare. By understanding the root causes and mental health consequences of child poverty, stakeholders can develop evidence-based, culturally grounded strategies that promote resilience, equity, and long-term development. The future of Benue, and Nigeria at large, hinges on how it treats its children today. Investing in their well-being is not only a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for national progress. Through committed efforts from policymakers, practitioners, and communities, it is possible to break the cycle of poverty and create a more just and hopeful future for every child.

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Beyond the Label: How Contextual Conditions Interact with Caregiving Networks in Poverty and Migration Settings in Costa Rica

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When addressing poverty in the Global South, underrepresentation and misrepresentation in mainstream science converge to create a perfect storm. Contexts from the Global South remain significantly underrepresented in developmental research (Henrich et al., 2010; Scheidecker et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021). This absence has shaped how caregiving and child development are conceptualized, particularly in contexts of scarcity (Carriere et al., in press; Scheidecker, 2024), as well as how related interventions are planned and implemented (Mai & Scheidecker, 2025). Too often, caregiving is portrayed as inherently deficient, as if this were intrinsic to these realities (Rasheed & Holding, 2024; Scheidecker et al., 2021; Scheidecker et al., 2022; Scheidecker et al., 2023; Scheidecker et al., 2025).

Under this blanket of overgeneralization, however, a wide spectrum of life experiences and conditions is ignored and treated as equivalent. Such an approach is insufficient for understanding parenting and child development in context (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017; Scheidecker et al., 2022). To address this gap, broader and more diverse evidence is needed on how families deal with subsistence and contextual pressures alongside caregiving tasks (Carriere et al., in press). These pressures—often material but not exclusively so—emerge from multiple sources and follow different dynamics. They are context-specific and culturally mediated, shaping caregiving and developmental processes in distinct ways. Capturing this complexity requires a holistic and context-sensitive approach.

Ecocultural Model of Development as a Lens to Understand Local Realities

Caregiving, culture, and environment are deeply interrelated (Keller, 2010; Whiting, 1963). Parenting and caregiving practices ultimately aim to foster the acquisition of environmental competence, a process that is particularly salient during the early years of ontogeny. The ecocultural model of development (Keller & Kärtner, 2013) conceptualizes this interrelation through a nested framework of ecosocial conditions, cultural models, and associated socialization strategies for understanding development in context.

At its broadest level, the model explains how populations are shaped by the opportunities and constraints of the physical environment (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). These factors structure the socio-economic system, including the mode of livelihood (e.g., industrial, subsistence), family organization (e.g., number of children, maternal age at childbirth), and household arrangements (e.g., extended or nuclear). Together, these aspects constitute distinct ecosocial contexts.

The next dimension is the cultural model, which refers to a specific and adaptive mindset that aligns universal human needs with the prevailing ecosocial context (Gamsakhurdia, 2020; Greenfield & Keller, 2004; Keller, 2007). Cultural models provide both implicit and explicit guidance for developing cultural competence within particular ecosocial conditions. They encompass hierarchically interrelated representational levels (e.g., socialization goals, parental ethnotheories) and behavioral domains (Keller & Kärtner, 2013). In practice, cultural models are expressed through socialization strategies and parenting behaviors, ultimately giving rise to diverse, culture-specific developmental pathways.

We resort to the tenets of the ecocultural model to advance understanding of the realities faced by families living in contexts of scarcity in Costa Rica. The focus on poverty is especially relevant: 23% of Costa Rican households live in poverty based on income, and when disaggregated by age, 29% of individuals in the 390,509 poor households are five years old or younger, nearly twice the proportion observed in non-poor households (IMAS, 2021).

Moreover, poverty reinforces social segregation (Arias-Ramírez & Sánchez-Hernández, 2015), closely linked to insufficient urban planning, limited housing access, and spatial patterns that perpetuate inequalities in geography and access to public goods (Arbaci, 2019; Jara-Sanabria, 2021). Taken together, these dynamics configure distinct physical, social, and symbolic environments.

Method

This contribution summarizes part of a broader doctoral project (Durán-Delgado, 2024) that examined the composition and functioning of caregiving networks in contexts of scarcity across three Costa Rican communities. While prior research has documented significant variations in cultural

Table 1. Demographics for all Sub-Samples.

Context	Mother's country of origin	Age of the mother		Age of the father		Single mothers	Years of schooling of the mother		Number of children		Age of the target child	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Freq.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Urban(n=16)	Costa Rican(n=8)	24.5	6.4	29.1	9.3	4	8.0	3.3	1.7	0.5	20.4	3.0
	Nicaraguan(n=8)	31.8	6.4	37.8	7.9	4	7.6	4.4	3.5	2.0	20.4	3.9
Transitional(n=16)	Costa Rican(n=8)	27.3	5.6	27.6	5.5	7	10.2	2.7	1.9	1.1	18.8	4.2
	Nicaraguan(n=8)	31.5	6.2	38.3	11.1	3	6.0	3.5	2.6	0.9	23.3	8.4
Rural(n=16)	Costa Rican(n=8)	26.4	7.4	37.3	21.6	4	7.5	2.8	2.5	1.1	15.1	4.6
	Nicaraguan(n=8)	30.3	7.5	53.3	29.2	2	5.5	3.0	3.6	2.3	19.6	6.0

and social environments in Costa Rica, as well as developmental outcomes (Aschemeyer et al., 2020; Keller et al., 2004; Rosabal-Coto, 2004; Schmidt et al., 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2023b), much remains to be learned about caregiving in the context of poverty.

Design

We opted for a narrative-based approach and thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2021) guidelines to highlight caregivers' representations of daily life in the local community and their caregiving routines. The narrative approach was preferred because it is considered an appropriate way to convey the meaning of the lived world in a dialogic setting (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Gubrium et al., 2012). This approach has also been proven to be culturally compatible with the way Latin American participants' communication style (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018), which is characterized by a preference for close personal interactions ("personalismo") and facilitates engagement and building trust (Marey-Sarwan & Ulitsa, 2020).

Selection of Contexts

Three Costa Rican communities were selected based on two main premises. First, the variation in human development indexes within the country at the community level was considered (low, mid, and high), as well as the representation of prototypical configurations of cultural and family models (Keller and Kärtner, 2013). Therefore, one traditionally urban community, one traditionally rural community, and one "transitional" community, that is, a context experiencing rapid urbanization, were chosen.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited with the help of the National Nutrition and Education Centers (acronym in Spanish CENCINAI), which provide nutrition, daycare, and educational services to low-income families through their nation-wide network of local facilities. The final sample consisted of 48 mothers with children between 12 and 24 months of age (Table 1). It was important to have a similar age range for the children so that the caregiving arrangements would address similar developmental needs. Participants were equally distributed among three contexts, with 16 participants in each subsample.

Finally, after conducting historical and demographic analyses and considering migration dynamics in the selected communities, we included a 50% quota of Nicaraguan participants in all three contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

An interview protocol was adapted based on literature recommendations from Gaskins et al. (2017) and instruments from a previous research project with a similar design that had already been validated with Costa Rican samples (Aschemeyer, 2019; Aschemeyer et al., 2020; Rosabal-Coto & Keller, 2015; Schmidt, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2023b). The instrument consists of nine broad categories of inquiry, namely, demographic information; target child's social world; housing conditions; livelihood; neighborhood and community life; target child's daily routine; prenatal care, birth, and postpartum care; parental beliefs and values.

The interviews took place between March 2021 and December 2022. Once collected, the material was transcribed verbatim by an external transcription team and subsequently verified by the principal researcher. Guided by the methodological framework of Braun and Clarke (2021), a coding manual was developed through three iterative rounds of coding. At the conclusion of each round, discussions with domain experts were conducted to ensure consensus. The resulting codes were organized into themes, which were further consolidated into broader analytical dimensions.

Results

The goal of this contribution was to examine the interaction between contextual dimensions and caregiving networks. To this end, the themes identified in the qualitative analysis were organized into five overarching contextual spheres (Figure 1), each illustrating how caregiving networks vary. Three of these dimensions reflect characteristics of the broader local context: institutional frameworks of action, livelihood solutions, and perceived social cohesion. The remaining two pertain to the internal dynamics of caregiving networks: caregiver availability and cultural expectations regarding the distribution of tasks.

The following section summarizes the main findings for each dimension, followed by an integrative discussion and implications.

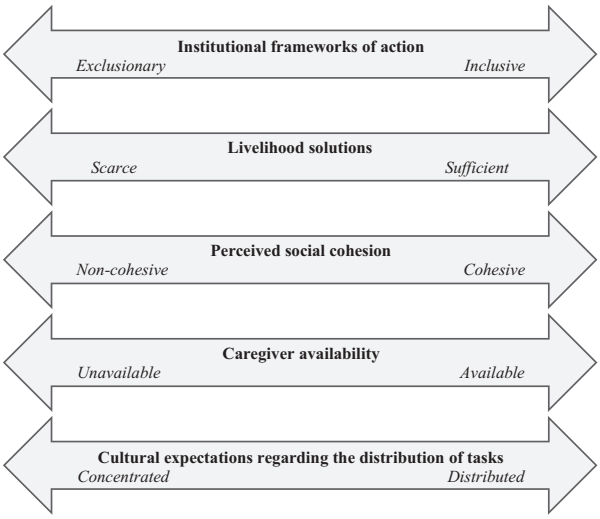

Figure 1. Identified Contextual Spheres and Variation.

Table 2. Interaction with Institutions.

Type of interaction with institutions	Examples
Political conflict and persecution in the country of origin: active targeted institutional violence towards the families.	*"When all that was happening, the political issues, I was in the part exactly where the bullets were (. . .) A lady from the church told me "Sister, I am going to leave (to Costa Rica) at dawn; come with me if you want to take the risk", and I said, "In the name of Jesus". And I went out at 3 o'clock in the morning to the bus stop and there I met her, and we crossed (the border) through blind spots."*
Access barriers to institutional services: limited or no access to public services including social welfare.	*"Yes, they are supposed to help you get training in something and land a job. But I have problems right now because I don't have a residency card, so they are not giving me those trainings. And also because of the pandemic and the low budget they have."*
Inclusion in institutional services: interaction with public services such as nutrition services and day care.	*"They do workshops, so they give if you have questions, they clarify them (. . .). In fact, that's where I learned that you could breastfeed and give her the milk from here, so I did that, they taught me how to do it, they give her a booklet, very interesting, very nice."*

Balancing External Pressures

Institutional Frameworks of Action: This dimension concerns the interactions between caregiving networks and local institutions. Institutional action ranges from exclusion to various levels of inclusion (see Table 2). Exclusion, associated with political persecution and institutional violence, was reported primarily by Nicaraguan families, reflecting their experiences in their home country. The other two types of institutional action were observed in both Costa Rican and Nicaraguan subsamples.

Political conflict and persecution are the two main reasons why Nicaraguan families migrate, the only other reason being a lack of livelihood. This has significant consequences, as it leads to uprooting and a significant loss of social capital. Compared to their Costa Rican counterparts, these families invest considerably more time and resources in navigating various institutions (e.g., police, immigration services, health services, social welfare agencies) prior to and following their migration to Costa Rica.

Access to social welfare in Costa Rica is comparatively less problematic for Nicaraguan families, as fewer requirements apply when underage children are involved, particularly with regard to nutritional programs. These provisions play a crucial role in meeting children's basic needs, a benefit also acknowledged by their Costa Rican counterparts.

Livelihood Solutions: All participants reported difficulties in meeting their financial obligations, a challenge particularly acute in families without at least one formally employed member or contributor. Across subsamples, livelihood strategies were characterized by compound income streams drawn from at least two sources, including various forms of employment, social welfare, contributions from cohabiting relatives, and child support (see Table 3).

Labor market participation followed a clear gendered pattern. Fathers, when present, were most likely to engage in formal employment, whereas nearly all mothers involved in income-generating activities participated in the informal sector. Among the 48 mothers surveyed, only 5 reported formal employment, while 21 engaged in informal, casual work—primarily food sales, catalog sales, sewing, housekeeping, and related activities. As a general rule, mothers engage in activities that have the least possible impact on their availability for caregiving.

Across subsamples, families' livelihoods are particularly compromised in configurations with one caregiver responsible for one child or multiple children, as well as in cases of parental separation or conflict.

Table 3. Relative Distribution of Source of Income by Sub-Sample.

	Sub-Sample					
Source of income	Urban CR	Urban – NIC	Transitional CR	Transitional NIC	Rural CR	Rural NIC
Employment	28.6	61.3	52.9	51.5	39.3	51.5
Voluntary child support	18.3	0.0	30.4	21.5	31.0	34.6
Mandatory child support	31.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.7	0.0
Social welfare	3.7	38.7	16.7	21.5	0.0	13.9
Rent	18.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pension	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.4	0.0	0.0

Note: The abbreviation "CR" refers to Costa Rican subsamples, and the abbreviation "NIC" refers to Nicaraguan subsamples.

Table 4. Summary of Findings About the Community Environment.

Sub-Sample	Social issues	Examples
Urban	High prevalence Direct effects	*"Well, I don't let my children go out, I don't like it. And even, this one, when my son says to me "Mom, can I go out?" Many moms there are irresponsible, maybe you go out and there are a few little kids in the street, I mean, no. You always have to have "malicia" (be cunning)."*
Transitional	Low prevalence Indirect effect	*"I never go out and I don't work. Most of the time when I go out, I go out with her and so on, I mean, I try never to leave her with anyone else."*
Rural	Perceived to be increasing Indirect effect	*"Outside the house, garden, or yard, in the front, are small children allowed to walk freely? PA: Oh yes, that's what they have the most."*

Social Cohesion: We coined the term "social cohesion" to refer to a combination of themes related to the sense of belonging to one's local community, the quality of one's relationships with neighbors, and the prevalence of social issues. The data indicate that such issues—particularly those related to violence, including drug trafficking and crime—directly undermine collective trust and shape the degree to which caregiving networks remain open to their immediate environment.

Across the three subsamples, the urban group emerged as the least cohesive, followed by the rural and transitional subsamples as more cohesive (see Table 4). Reports were relatively uniform when disaggregated by country of origin.

In general, families report spending most of their time at home and having occasional contact with the community. However, these boundaries become more rigid, the less cohesive the immediate environment becomes.

This result also appears to align with caregiver involvement. In the transitional context, even in the absence of cohabitation, reported levels of involvement are higher than in the other two contexts. This outcome may be linked to local representations that place a positive value on family life.

Varying Caregiving Arrangements

Caregiver Availability: This dimension refers to who is actively present and taking care of the child. In this regard, we found that the average number of caregivers varies across subsamples (see Table 5). Costa Rican subsamples in urban and transitional contexts report, on average, more caregivers compared to Nicaraguan subsamples, largely because local networks are more likely to include extended family members.

For Nicaraguan families, separation from extended kin due to migration reduces such involvement. Moreover, when maternal grandmothers are present, they tend to be less involved than their local counterparts. This disparity is often linked to their participation in income-generating activities or to conflictual relationships with the mother.

Table 5. Average Number of Caregivers by Sub-Sample.

Sub-Sample	N	Media	DE	Min	Max
Urban CR	8	3.1	0.64	2	4
Urban NIC	8	2.5	1.07	1	4
Transitional CR	8	4.0	1.07	2	5
Transitional NIC	8	2.6	1.30	1	5
Rural CR	8	1.8	0.71	1	3
Rural NIC	8	2.8	0.99	2	5

Note: N = sample size; DE = standard deviation; Media = mean; Min = minimum value; Max = maximum value.
The abbreviation "CR" refers to Costa Rican subsamples, and the abbreviation "NIC" refers to Nicaraguan subsamples.

It is important to note that the composition of caregiving networks in the rural sample does not align with expected patterns, particularly among Costa Rican families. While rural environments are typically associated with larger caregiving networks, rising social challenges – which, as we have argued, may undermine the value attached to family life – appear to play a role. In this regard, reports about conflicts with fathers and other extended family members may also influence this outcome.

Cultural Expectations Regarding Task Distribution: According to participants' reports (Table 6), caregiving tasks are not equally distributed among those involved. Caregiving is significantly concentrated among mothers, particularly in bioregulatory roles such as feeding, caring for hygiene, and

Table 6. Average Number of Caregivers by Role Category.

		Sub-Sample					
Caregivers	**Roles**	Urban CR (n=8)	Urban NIC (n=8)	Transitional CR (n=8)	Transitional NIC (n=8)	Rural CR (n=8)	Rural NIC (n=8)
Mothers	*Bioregulatory roles*	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Social roles	7.5	7.2	7.5	7.2	7.2	7.2
Fathers	*Bioregulatory roles*	2.3	1.6	4.6	2.6	2.0	1.0
	Social roles	3.2	2.7	5.2	3.7	1.7	2.2
Maternal grandmothers	*Bioregulatory roles*	1.0	0.3	1.0	-	2.0	-
	Social roles	2.7	1.2	2.2	-	1.7	-
Paternal grandmothers	*Bioregulatory roles*	1.0	-	2.3	0.3	-	-
	Social roles	1.0	-	0.7	0.5	-	1.0
Aunts	*Bioregulatory roles*	1.6	–	0.6	1.0	0.6	0.6
	Social roles	1.2	0.5	2.0	0.5	1.5	0.7
Siblings	*Bioregulatory roles*	0.3	1.0	-	0.3	-	-
	Social roles	4.3	5.0	2.6	5.7	3.6	5.0

Note: The abbreviation "CR" refers to Costa Rican subsamples, and the abbreviation "NIC" refers to Nicaraguan subsamples.

health care. Overall, paternal involvement is lower than maternal involvement, but it occurs more frequently in Costa Rican subsamples, especially in transitional and urban contexts.

Mothers' involvement is not only task- but time-intensive, with most mothers spending the majority of their time with their children. Mothers, as primary caregivers, report dedicating limited time to other non-domestic or care-related activities. When present, other caregivers dedicate, on average, less time to the child, and mostly participate in social caregiving roles, such as leisure, play, and learning.

Mothers' intensive dedication compared to other caregivers is also anchored in cultural representations of motherhood, which also appeared to be present in all subsamples (*"As a mother, you are always the one who is always the most involved with them, right?"; "I am the one who decides everything"; "The father doesn't get involved in those things at all"; "I try never to leave her with anyone")*. This outcome suggests that mothers are very likely to compensate for partial or inconsistent involvement of other potential caregivers to guarantee the child's well-being. Moreover, constant maternal presence is also deemed valuable in contexts perceived as unsafe.

However, it is important to note that mothers report their children being emotionally close and expressive with all present caregivers, even those who are only occasionally involved. Mothers value their children's developmental outcomes and recognize the importance of the family in this regard (*"It's the family that is taking care of him"*).

Typical Configurations

Taken together, the characterization of the different dimensions provides critical insight into the key features of the studied contexts, allowing the identification of both protective and high-risk configurations.

High-risk scenarios were marked by small caregiving networks—most often one caregiver responsible for one or multiple children—operating under one or more contextual pressures. In our data, these scenarios were predominantly represented by Nicaraguan families who had relocated to Costa Rica in response to political persecution or material hardship, and who were residing in non-cohesive urban settings with limited access to employment sources and/or social services.

By contrast, protective scenarios emerged where the interplay of dimensions mitigated contextual pressures in more adaptive ways. A typical example was the balancing of livelihood constraints through social support and more distributed caregiving arrangements. Such configurations were observed more frequently among local families and within the more cohesive transitional context.

In sum, the dynamic checks and balances between dimensions illuminate how caregiving networks allocate resources and exercise agency to meet the demands of care under varying conditions.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this contribution is to examine the contextual dimensions that shape caregiving in scarcity settings. One of its central findings is that engaged caregiving constitutes the norm rather than the exception across all subsamples. Yet, a range of constraining factors influences how caregiving networks address these tasks.

A key dimension concerns shifts in the ecosocial context, particularly in four areas. The first is the impact of institutional exclusion and violence as a driver of migration among Nicaraguan families. Migration often entails uprooting and the reconfiguration of caregiving networks upon settlement in new territories, frequently resulting in the loss of social capital (see Smith-Castro et al., 2021, 2023, for a detailed discussion of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica).

The second area relates to adaptation within available subsistence systems. Here, the time required for income-generating activities reduces the availability of potential caregivers. The greater the uncertainty surrounding livelihood strategies, the more families must depend on these activities and on social safety nets (Franzoni & Voorend, 2011).

The third area involves the presence of social issues and the extent to which caregiving networks must distance themselves

from the immediate environment to ensure children's safety and well-being. Evidence from other low-income communities suggests that cohesive contexts (Alcalá et al., 2021; Gaskins, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021) provide caregiving networks with stronger collective support resources, which can also foster a more equitable distribution of caregiving tasks.

Finally, in the representational sphere, this contribution highlights how traditional conceptions of care as primarily a female responsibility (see INEC, 2023, on time-use in Costa Rica) can exacerbate the demands placed on mothers in conditions of limited social capital. These include inconsistent caregiver availability, interpersonal conflict, and exposure to social violence (Galvan et al., 2021). Mothers, though constantly present, are often compelled to juggle subsistence, domestic responsibilities, and caregiving simultaneously.

Two central implications emerge from these findings. First, ethical interventions aimed at improving the well-being of families and children must be context-sensitive, recognizing the ways in which local conditions shape caregiving practices and developmental outcomes (Morelli et al., 2018; Scheidecker et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2021). Second, such initiatives may legitimately target one or more contextual spheres—such as strengthening community ties, expanding neighborhood support, or reducing institutional barriers—before focusing directly on parental behavior. In contexts marked by poverty or migration, such behavior-centered interventions risk becoming an additional burden for families already navigating multiple structural constraints.

The findings further illustrate that even under scarcity, cohesive contexts organized around many-adult–many-child caregiving networks distribute responsibilities more effectively and may create protective conditions for children. These configurations require interventions distinct from those appropriate to one-adult–one-child or one-adult–many-child households, where caregiving resources are thinner and demands are more concentrated. Nicaraguan families, in turn, face challenges rooted in their histories of displacement, separation, and resettlement. Within this group, those with experiences of political persecution or exile are particularly vulnerable and demand tailored approaches.

In conclusion, context-sensitive research and interventions must rely on tools and methodologies capable of mapping the different contextual spheres and identifying critical imbalances between them. The narrative approach privileged in this contribution offers one promising avenue, as it fosters personalized engagement and captures nuance even within standardized evaluation frameworks. To be effective, however, such approaches require culturally informed, methodologically sensitive, and sustained collaboration between researchers, institutions, and community actors.

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Promoting Early Childhood Development in Urban Poverty: *Istanbul95*

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Exposure to poverty in the first three years of life exacerbates children's vulnerability to developmental as well as learning problems more deeply than any other period (Duncan et al., 2012), and contributes to early developmental disparities (Fernald et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2021). To reduce the widening inequities in health and developmental outcomes, early childhood development (ECD) programs have become a priority, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where an estimated 250 million children under age 5 years cannot reach their developmental potential (Black et al., 2017). The global Urban95 initiative, launched by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, seeks to improve the well-being of young children in urban poverty by encouraging policymakers, local governments, and social scientists to view the city from 95 centimeters—the height of a 3-year-old—and expand access to early childhood development services (Vincelot, 2019).

This brief report outlines the implementation of the global Urban95 initiative in Türkiye—where child poverty rates rank among the highest in the OECD (OECD, 2019)—with a focus on its adaptation in Istanbul, the country's largest metropolis, as *Istanbul95*. First, taking the nurturing care as a conceptual framework for *Istanbul95*, we describe the role of parenting on ECD and parenting interventions to support ECD, with key conclusions that have emerged from prior empirical studies. Next, we provide a brief account of the global Urban95 initiative and subsequently introduce two components of *Istanbul95*—neighborhood mapping and public space transformations—and then devote greater attention to the third component, the home visitation (HV) model for parent coaching. Third, we summarize the qualitative as well as quantitative research findings regarding the impact of the HV program. Finally, we offer recommendations for policymakers as the *Istanbul95* program points to the fact that a comprehensive approach is needed to promote the development of young children who live under disadvantaged conditions.

The Nurturing Care Framework and Early Childhood Development Programs

The first three years of life are a period of rapid growth, shaping children's physical, emotional, and cognitive skills (Black et al., 2017; Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007), as the brain development is especially receptive to environmental stimuli during this stage and adapts quickly in response to experiences (Blair & Raver, 2016). Growing evidence suggests that skills built during this period create the foundation for later health, learning, and even future economic success (Grantham-McGregor & Smith, 2016; Hostinar & Miller, 2019; Knudsen et al., 2006). The Nurturing Care framework, an evidence-based approach to guide ECD programs and policies, emphasizes that children thrive in stable environments where their needs for safety, nutrition, health, affection, and early learning are met (Black et al., 2021). Because caregivers are the primary providers of nurturing care in the earliest years of life (Britto et al., 2017), this framework highlights the importance of enhancing caregivers' parenting capacity while ensuring families' access to necessary resources and support.

Yet, substantial research shows that poverty and low socioeconomic status (SES) can undermine caregivers' mental well-being (Murray et al., 2019), and their capacity to provide affection and exposure to language as well as early learning opportunities (Bradley & Putnick, 2012; Golinkoff et al., 2019; Hart & Risley, 1995; Pace et al., 2017). There is consistent evidence that children exposed to poverty in early years suffer from negative outcomes such as stunted growth, poor physical health, difficulties in emotion regulation, and delays in cognitive skills, which can be long-lasting, making this developmental period especially vulnerable (Dufford et al., 2025; Shonkoff et al., 2012). More importantly, SES disparities in development have been detected as early as 18 months (Fernald et al., 2013). As the developmental gap between children from advantaged and disadvantaged families tends to widen with age (Rubio-Codina et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2021), ECD programs guided by the nurturing care framework have taken on greater significance to narrow this gap.

ECD programs typically incorporate family guidance to strengthen caregiver-child relationships, foster stimulating home environments, and provide parents with information on health and nutrition (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2015). Although early childhood poverty poses many risks,

emerging evidence suggests that high-quality ECD programs for disadvantaged families can buffer children against adversity, improving cognitive and language outcomes with effects lasting into adulthood (Britto et al., 2017; Jeong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). ECD programs also significantly enhance parenting practices, fostering greater involvement, responsiveness, and play with children (Jeong et al., 2018; 2021). Economic analyses further indicate that such programs enhance parental employment and family self-sufficiency (Heckman, 2006).

Supporting Early Childhood Development Through Urban95 Initiative

Research shows that young children grow and learn most within their families, but resources in their neighborhoods and communities, such as safe and accessible play spaces, also play a role in shaping their development (Blair et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2013; Ferguson & Evans, 2023). The Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF), established in 1964, is an independent Dutch organization that aims to support early childhood development through evidence-based knowledge and large-scale program implementation. Its mission is twofold: first, to raise awareness among governments and partner organizations—including civil society actors and urban planners—regarding the long-term value of early childhood investment; and second, to provide expertise and financial support to translate promising ideas into scalable practice.

One of BvLF's flagship initiatives is *Urban95*, launched in 2016 to improve the well-being of young children and families in urban settings, particularly under disadvantaged conditions. For further details, readers may consult the program's official website (https://vanleerfoundation.org/urban95/). The initiative challenges policymakers, municipalities, and urban designers to view cities from the perspective of a healthy three-year-old child—approximately 95 cm tall—and to redesign urban spaces accordingly. Its framework prioritizes environments that are safe (e.g., secure pedestrian crossings), accessible (e.g., nearby public spaces), comfortable (e.g., facilities for breastfeeding and play), and stimulating (e.g., parks supporting unstructured play and parent-child interaction). Such spaces foster cognitive and socio-emotional development while reducing parental stress (Black et al., 2017; Ferguson & Evans, 2023).

Istanbul95: An Urban95 City Partnership

Nearly one-third of Turkish children under the age of six years live in persistent poverty, and rapid rural-to-urban migration has created additional risks such as overcrowded housing, unsafe neighborhoods, and a lack of social services (Dayıoğlu & Demir Şeker, 2016). Families often struggle with low education, unemployment, and stress, which further challenge parenting. Launched in 2018, *Istanbul95* aims to deliver comprehensive child and family services for economically disadvantaged families in Istanbul https://vanleerfoundation.org/cases/data-mapping-informs-home-visits-in-istanbul/. The project engages multiple stakeholders, drawing on interdisciplinary collaboration among academicians in psychology, educational sciences, and industrial design—together with a foundation in social studies, an international architecture practice, and district municipalities. The program combined neighborhood mapping to reach those most in need, public space projects to create safe play areas for young children, and a home visitation program to coach parents in nurturing caregiving. Together, these efforts aimed to give children a healthier and safer start in life. Pilot implementations have taken place in four districts of Istanbul—Beyoğlu, Maltepe, Sarıyer, and Sultabeyli.

Neighborhood Mapping System

The first component of *Istanbul95* involved developing a neighborhood mapping to identify disadvantaged areas for HV programs and child- and family-friendly public space projects. Conducted collaboratively by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation and Kadir Has University Istanbul Studies Center, the mapping combined neighborhood-level child population data with real estate values as a proxy for family income. Neighborhoods were color-coded to indicate concentrations of young children (0–4 years) and socioeconomic disadvantage. The maps also integrate municipal and private service capacities, including daycare centers, health services, counseling units, parks, social aid, and educational facilities. This digital visualization provides a comprehensive overview of service availability, supporting data-driven decision-making for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. By highlighting neighborhoods with high needs and limited resources, the maps facilitate targeted urban planning interventions and monitoring of social services, particularly for underserved families in Istanbul.

Child-friendly Urban Transformations

The second component of Istanbul95 aimed to create outdoor public spaces that offer opportunities for movement, exploration, play, and stress recovery. Project architects implemented programs to create family- and child-friendly urban environments, enhance pedestrian safety, and encourage slower traffic. Pilot neighborhoods were first evaluated for their suitability through "stroller audit" events, in which deputy mayors and municipal managers, along with caregivers, navigated streets with strollers to raise awareness of the challenges families face. Project architects, in collaboration with the municipalities, designed exemplary playgrounds in the pilot districts. These were the first Istanbul playgrounds to incorporate age-appropriate motor skill activities for infants and toddlers to promote curiosity, discovery, mastery, and positive caregiver-child and peer interactions.

Home Visitation (HV) Program for Parent Coaching

The HV program within *Istanbul95* was designed as a parenting program offering bi-weekly visits from the prenatal period through the first three years of life. Its central aim was to address a major service gap for pregnant women and mothers of infants and toddlers to support infant mental health, responsive parenting, maternal well-being, and child nutrition. An academic team was responsible for developing

and evaluating the program (Çorapçı et al., 2023), while district municipalities implemented it.

The program development began with a review of evidence-based HV models, complemented by four focus groups in *Istanbul95* pilot districts. Focus groups with mothers guided the cultural adaptation of the HV program, emphasizing the caregivers' needs in play, soothing strategies, nutrition, and stress management. Based on the *nurturing care* framework and the needs identified in these focus groups, three content areas were prioritized in program content: parenting practices, maternal psychological well-being, and nutrition.

To address the first content domain, the *Reach Up and Learn (*Walker et al., 2011), an empirically-validated HV program originally developed in Jamaica and subsequently implemented in diverse LMICs, including Bangladesh, Colombia, Brazil, and Peru (Attanasio et al., 2014; Brentani et al., 2020; Hamadani et al., 2006; Rubio-Codina et al., 2016) was adapted to the Turkish cultural context. Evidence shows that the *Reach Up and Learn* program contributes to long-term gains in children's cognitive, academic, and psychosocial outcomes, as well as cognitively stimulating caregiver-child interactions, such as play and verbal engagement (Grantham-McGregor & Smith, 2016; Walker et al., 2011). To address the second content domain, an adaptation of the *Thinking Healthy* program (WHO, 2015) was embedded into the first six months of home visits. Mothers, regardless of depression level, were guided through conversations facilitated by illustrated cards. These picture cards depicted themes of social support, bonding with the infant, and self-care. In past research, this psychoeducational approach has been shown to promote positive coping strategies and stress reduction among mothers (Singla et al., 2021). Finally, to address the third content domain, which promotes healthy feeding practices, handouts were prepared with key nutrition messages, that were aligned with national and international guidelines. The content emphasized maternal nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, breastfeeding, complementary feeding practices, and hygiene.

The HV program was implemented by four district municipalities in pilot neighborhoods—Beyoğlu, Maltepe, Sarıyer, and Sultanbeyli. Each municipality recruited three to four full-time female home visitors and one female supervisor from their staff, who were trained during a 10-day program. This training combined lectures with role-plays and group activities to ensure practical skills in the implementation of the HV program that highlights demonstrating play activities and providing feedback to the mother-child dyad. Supervisors attended an additional three-day training and provided ongoing monitoring to ensure implementation fidelity.

Families were recruited using the neighborhood maps, which identified areas of concentrated disadvantage. Ultimately, 400 families participated in the HV program on a rolling basis between 2018 and 2020. Each family received visits averaging 30–40 minutes biweekly. Visits included review of prior activities, demonstration and practice of play and language interactions, discussion of *Thinking Healthy* cards during the early postpartum months, nutrition education, and shared singing. Homework assignments encouraged parents to continue activities between visits. Each family was paired with one consistent home visitor, who managed between 25 and 40 families. Supervisors conducted regular monitoring visits to ensure quality, drawing on best practices in HV programs (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2015; Britto et al., 2017).

Istanbul95 HV program integrated several characteristics identified as effective in changing parenting behavior. These included frequent visits, structured curricula with age-appropriate activities, trained and supervised home visitors, modeling of skills followed by caregiver practice, provision of homework and handouts, and integration of nutrition guidance (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2015; Kaminski et al., 2008). The embedding of the program within the municipal services further strengthened its ability to connect families to health care, social services, and economic assistance, supporting a holistic approach (Britto et al., 2017).

Research Findings on the HV Program Impact

We conducted both qualitative and quantitative research to assess the impact of the HV program (Çorapçı et al., 2023; Çorapçı et al., 2024). First, in each district, focus groups were conducted with 5-8 mothers and 3-5 home visitors separately, to assess the acceptability and feasibility of the program (Çorapçı et al., 2023). Mothers were asked about the home visits, the materials used in the intervention, the program's structure and content, their relationship with the home visitors, and their overall impressions. For home visitors, the questions addressed the program's appropriateness, the home-visit curriculum, the training process, supervision, and the rewarding and challenging aspects of their role.

Mothers stated that they were quite pleased to be visited at home. They agreed that home visits were more comfortable than going to a center, especially during late pregnancy and the baby's first year. Furthermore, they also valued the trust that developed through repeated visits and the home visitor's ability to observe the baby in their natural environment. Some mothers describe the home visitor as a "*sister*," while others refer to them as a "*friend*," indicating the close relationship that develops over time. Mothers appreciated that the program started before birth, noting that the information they received helped them feel more prepared for childbirth. They also learned that they could begin communicating with their babies during pregnancy. Mothers also stated that the regular home visits helped them monitor their babies' learning, vocalization, and motor skills more closely. Finally, they identified the most beneficial aspects of the programme as learning about language development, discovering that they could make toys suitable for their babies' development using simple, inexpensive materials, and realising that they needed to set aside time for themselves as mothers, that this was not irresponsible, and that seeking support from their community was normal and necessary.

Focus groups with the home visitors revealed that they see their primary responsibilities as reassuring and informing mothers, starting from before birth and throughout the first year, to help them raise their babies healthy, as well as bringing homemade toys from recycled materials and teaching mothers skills for activities they could do with their babies. Many of the home visitors interviewed stated that they saw themselves as a kind of '*companion*' to the mother. Home visitors noted that the program's key benefits included helping

mothers prepare for childbirth in a healthy way, supporting breastfeeding, fostering strong emotional bonds and communication with their babies, and raising mothers' awareness of the importance of self-care and seeking support when needed. Home visitors also reported that they refer families facing financial hardship—especially those needing household goods, heating, or food—to municipal departments, district governors' offices, the Ministry of Family and Social Services support line, or local government call centres.

The vast majority of home visitors mentioned that they struggled to arrive on time for appointments due to transport difficulties. They also noted that it often took a long time for call center social service specialists to contact families, that monthly payments could be delayed for up to a year, and that the payments were very insufficient. Finally, home visitors reported feeling unsafe in some neighborhoods or homes due to crime, poor housing conditions, and challenging family dynamics, such as hostile or disruptive behavior from spouses. They reported sharing their challenges with supervisors and colleagues to cope and maintain their well-being. Some also noted that talking with other psychologists at the municipality helped them feel better.

In evaluating the HV program impact, we also used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design (Çorapçı et al., 2024). Mothers were allocated to either the HV (n =282) or the control (n = 244) group. A substantial proportion of mothers reported challenges in meeting basic needs. Most participants were in the third trimester of pregnancy at enrollment, whereas those enrolling postnatally had infants who were only a few weeks old. All mothers in the entire sample were married, except for one divorced and one widowed mother.

Data were collected from intervention and control groups at three points: prior to the HV program (T1), when children were about 9 months (T2), and at the completion of the HV program trial when children were 18 months (T3). At T1, mothers reported on demographics, risk factors, depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; CES-D 10; Andresen et al., 1994), home chaos (Confusion, Hubbub, and Order Scale;Matheny et al., 1995), and parenting attitudes (a 6-item scale developed by the Reach Up team; e.g., singing and chatting with your baby will help him/her learn); at T2, on postpartum depression (CES-D 10) and stimulating parenting (a checklist for the frequency of talking, playing, singing, looking at books/storytelling, and praising their child on a 4-point Likert scale); and at T3, on child language development (Turkish version of the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory; Aksu-Koç et al., 2019).

Data collected at T1 were used to assess the baseline equivalence between the HV and control groups. Baseline analyses using independent samples *t*-tests and chi-square tests indicated no significant group differences in maternal age, depression, parity, total risk index, home chaos, or attitudes toward cognitive stimulation. However, HV mothers were more educated, reported less financial strain, and had more children, and their postnatally enrolled infants were younger than those in the control group. These variables were statistically controlled in the main analyses to account for baseline group differences. To better understand whether and how the HV intervention worked, regression analyses using the PROCESS V4.2 macro for SPSS 25.0 were conducted. Results revealed that enrollment in the HV program predicted more frequent maternal engagement in stimulating parenting. Stimulating parenting at T2 predicted child vocabulary at T3, even after controlling for intervention status. Furthermore, the indirect pathway from intervention status to child vocabulary through stimulating parenting was significant. In other words, mothers who participated in the HV program engaged more frequently in cognitively stimulating parenting at T2, which in turn contributed to larger child vocabularies at T3 (Çorapçı et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The *Istanbul95*, in general, and the HV program, in particular, represent a significant innovation in Türkiye's early childhood service landscape. *İstanbul95* exemplifies a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to supporting vulnerable families with young children, distinguished by three key features. First, its implementation through local municipalities positions the program for sustainability by leveraging existing service networks. Municipalities in Türkiye are increasingly responsible for child-focused services, traditionally targeting older children. By integrating HV and related supports within the municipal structures for the first time, *Istanbul95* builds local capacity, establishes long-term collaboration with universities, and demonstrates the feasibility of delivering early childhood services that respond to local needs. Pilot implementations across four Istanbul districts highlighted the program's adaptability to diverse population characteristics and local contexts, underscoring the benefits of linking parenting interventions with healthcare, welfare, and child protection services.

Second, the program employs a data-driven approach to target services and monitor outcomes. Neighborhood-level maps, combining child population and real estate values as proxies for socioeconomic status, enable municipalities to identify areas of high need and assess the distribution of existing child and family services. This visualization highlights disparities in service availability and informs strategic planning for new interventions. Regularly updated maps support monitoring, outcome assessment, and resource allocation, enhancing both effectiveness and sustainability.

Third, *Istanbul95* prioritizes the physical environment through the creation of age-appropriate, safe, and stimulating outdoor spaces. Parks and public areas were redesigned to meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers while promoting safe access and mobility for caregivers, strollers, and other populations with special needs. These enriched external spaces complement HV efforts, creating a continuum of support for child development and caregiver engagement. Finally, by combining evidence-based practices from the *Reach Up and Learn* program with culturally adapted content, maternal mental health support, and nutrition education, the HV program addressed multiple dimensions of early development. Implementation through district municipalities has enabled integration with local services, while training and supervision structures supported program fidelity.

In conclusion, *Istanbul95*'s integration of municipalities, universities, and civil society fosters a sustainable and scalable framework. Collaborative partnerships allow for academic expertise in program development, training, and supervision, while municipal oversight ensures continuity and broader impact. This synergy enables a holistic approach that addresses parenting, maternal well-being, child nutrition, and safe learning environments, offering a model for sustainable urban early childhood services.

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Child in Context: Advancing an Integrated Approach to Child Poverty

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The detrimental effects of growing up in poverty across developmental domains are well-documented (Cooper & Stewart, 2021; Peverill et al., 2021; Tran et al, 2017). Importantly, these negative consequences often begin prenatally, through maternal factors such as stress and nutritional deficits, and can persist into adulthood, affecting health, behavior, and socioeconomic outcomes (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Duncan & Magnuson, 2012; Hackman et al., 2010; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Addressing child poverty is therefore both a moral and social imperative. This article discusses three core principles for mitigating child poverty: multi-domain family support, child- and family-centered approaches, and whole-system involvement[1].

Child Poverty: Definition and Theoretical Frameworks

Before discussing strategies to reduce child poverty, it is important to clarify the term, which can be misleading. Child poverty is not a characteristic of the child but reflects the broader context in which they grow up. While insufficient financial resources are central, poverty is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional condition (D'Attoma & Matteucci, 2024), encompassing material, social, and cultural deprivation. These deprivations limit children's access to education, healthcare, safe housing, social networks, and culturally normative activities, thereby constraining child development and family well-being (UNICEF, 2020). Understanding poverty in this broader sense is crucial for designing support that addresses immediate needs and structural inequalities, fostering children's development, and breaking cycles of intergenerational disadvantage.

Theoretical models highlight the complex, systemic nature of how poverty affects children. Family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997) conceptualizes the family as an interconnected unit, positing that changes or stressors in one subsystem influence the functioning of others. Building on this, the Family Stress Model shows that economic hardship causes parental stress and mental health issues, which in turn compromise parenting quality and children's development (Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger et al., 2010; Masarik & Conger, 2017). Complementary to these stress-based perspectives, Becker's investment model (Becker & Tomes, 1986; Yeung et al., 2002) emphasizes that family resources—financial, material, and temporal—directly shape the opportunities parents can provide, such as educational materials or enriching experiences.

While these models illuminate important intra-family processes, they provide less guidance on the broader social and structural contexts. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) positions children within nested layers of influence, from their immediate family and school contexts to broader community, policy, and cultural settings. Integrative frameworks (Yoshikawa et al., 2012) show how stress and investment pathways function within these broader, larger ecological contexts. Together, these frameworks underscore the multidimensional and interdependent mechanisms through which poverty affects children. Therefore, addressing child poverty requires more than isolated interventions or single-domain solutions. Rather, it necessitates an integrated approach that recognizes the complex, systemic, and multidimensional nature of poverty. Three core principles of an integrated approach to child poverty emerge: (1) multi-domain family support; (2) child- and family-centered approaches; and (3) whole-system involvement. The following sections discuss each of these principles.

Multi-Domain Family Support

The first core principle emphasizes multi-domain family support. Evidence demonstrates that increasing household income – a key component of the financial domain – is critical for reducing child poverty. Studies from high-income countries demonstrate causal effects of income supplementation on children's cognitive, social, and health outcomes (Cooper & Stewart, 2021). Similarly, studies in low- and middle-income countries show that cash transfer programs can reduce poverty, improve education and nutrition, and enhance empowerment, savings, and labor outcomes (Bastagli et al., 2019). While these findings are robust, not all families benefit equally. Additional challenges—such as parental mental health issues, poor-quality or unstable housing, limited access to education and health services, and restricted opportunities for social and cultural participation—benefit less if these issues are not addressed alongside financial support (Conger et al., 2010; Desmond & Kimbro, 2015).

Supporting families in poverty requires combining income support with targeted assistance across multiple life domains (Edwards & Downes, 2013; Evans et al., 2025; Scott & Gong, 2021). At the policy level, poverty must be recognized as a cross-cutting issue. It cannot be confined to one administrative sector or delegated to a single group of policymakers. Often, financial, housing, health, and social support systems function independently, with different rules, accountability structures, and funding streams (Edwards & Downes, 2013; Scott & Gong, 2021). Families navigating these fragmented systems may experience uncoordinated or even contradictory support, undermining overall effectiveness (Nooteboom et al., 2021; Scott & Gong, 2021; Van Eck et al., 2024).

Aligning services across domains reduces the burden on families, addresses their multiple needs, and enhances family well-being and child outcomes. Effective multi-domain support relies on interprofessional collaboration. However, differences in professional cultures, unclear responsibilities, and limited information sharing can reduce its effectiveness (Nooteboom et al., 2021). Strengthening collaboration mechanisms is essential to making multi-domain family support effective (Edwards & Downes, 2013; Nooteboom et al., 2021; Van Eck et al., 2024). A concrete example of an integrated model is the *Mothers of Rotterdam* program, combining debt counseling, health care, parenting, and other life domains simultaneously through multidisciplinary teams (Bertens et al., 2023).

Child- and Family-Centered Approach

The second core principle emphasizes placing the child and family at the center of anti-poverty strategies. Support is most effective when tailored to each family's specific priorities and circumstances, ensuring it is comprehensive yet responsive to what families identify as most important. Families experiencing poverty are diverse—they differ in composition, the severity and type of challenges they face, and the resources they can mobilize—requiring flexible, individualized support (Evans et al., 2025). Effective support requires professionals to collaborate closely with families, treating them as active partners rather than passive recipients of services. Support should be demand-driven, guided by the families' questions and priorities rather than standardized, supply-driven approaches. This requires actively listening to families and co-developing solutions while recognizing the vulnerabilities and strengths. At the same time, this approach acknowledges that families cannot always address all challenges on their own (Evans et al., 2025). Well-being is also supported by the protective and promotive resources available in the broader family and community context, highlighting the collective and interconnected nature of resilience (Masten, 2014).

A child- and family-centered perspective also recognizes the distinct needs of children and the dynamic interactions among family members. While support often targets parents under the valid assumption that strengthening caregivers indirectly benefits children, this does not automatically ensure that children's perspectives and priorities are addressed. For example, children may value opportunities for play, peer interaction, or school participation alongside their caregivers' efforts to secure housing or debt relief. Approaches that engage the wider family system are often more effective than those targeting individuals alone. For instance, parenting support that works with the family as a whole improves outcomes for both children and parents (Weeland et al., 2021). Evidence from two-generation approaches shows that support is most effective when it considers the needs and strengths of parents and children simultaneously, providing coordinated support that respects each individual's priorities (Sommer et al., 2024).

Finally, genuinely child- and family-centered approaches involve families with lived experience in shaping support and policies. Studies demonstrate that co-design with families facing complex challenges—such as poverty, parental mental health issues, or domestic violence—enhances the relevance, legitimacy, and effectiveness of support (Muir et al., 2024). This principle aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which underlines the children's right to be heard. Frameworks such as Hart's model of participation (Hart, 1992) provide guidance for meaningful involvement. Internationally, initiatives like UNICEF's *Child Friendly Cities Initiative* (2018) show how children's perspectives can be systematically integrated in policies and programs that affect their daily lives, including efforts to reduce poverty and improve access to education, health, and social services.

Whole-System Involvement: An Ecological Perspective

The third core principle—whole-system involvement—emphasizes that everyone surrounding a child can play a role in addressing poverty, either by mitigating its negative effects or by supporting families' access to resources and opportunities. This includes the immediate family, extended kin, community networks, schools, healthcare providers, social services, policymakers, and broader societal structures. This principle can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which identifies five interrelated levels of influence:

Microsystem: Immediate settings in which children interact daily, including family, school, peers, neighbors, and local programs. Supportive relationships in these contexts directly shape children's experiences and developmental outcomes. For example, within the family, responsive parenting and active involvement in children's learning can buffer the cognitive and emotional effects of economic hardship (Conger & Conger, 2002; Masarik & Conger, 2017).

Mesosystem: Connections and interactions between different microsystems, such as the collaboration between parents and teachers. Open and trusting communication across settings can enhance consistency in children's experiences and improve outcomes. Family-focused collaborative learning interventions suggest that such coordination can increase parental involvement in children's learning and strengthen educational support at home (Keizer et al., 2024).

Exosystem: Contexts that do not directly involve the child but influence family conditions, such as parental workplaces, social services, and local policies. For instance, flexible working hours, parental leave, and job security can reduce

parental stress and enable positive parenting (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

Macrosystem: Broader cultural, institutional, and policy contexts that shape the environment in which families and children live. For example, policies such as minimum income schemes, child benefits, and unconditional cash transfers directly impact material conditions and lay the foundation for child development (Bastagli et al., 2019; Cooper & Stewart, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). In addition, awareness campaigns and supportive legislation can reduce stigma, mobilize resources, and foster comprehensive policy responses to child poverty (UNICEF, 2020).

Chronosystem: Temporal dynamics that influence children's development, including life transitions and societal changes. For instance, events such as parental job loss, family separation, or housing instability can have lasting effects on children's well-being. These dynamics underscore the need for adaptive, long-term strategies involving stakeholders across all system levels to mitigate risks and promote children's well-being over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Shonkoff et al., 2009; Shonkoff et al., 2012).

Each ecological level contributes distinct forms of support. A responsive parent, a supportive neighbor, a collaborative teacher–parent relationship, a flexible workplace, or societal awareness campaigns all play complementary roles. These supports operate through everyday interactions and experiences – the proximal processes that shape children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Poverty influences these processes by limiting opportunities, resources, and stability, while positive supports can mitigate risks and promote resilience. Along with multi-domain, child- and family-centered approaches, whole-system involvement ensures comprehensive, coordinated, and responsive support for children and families across all contexts, from the immediate household to broader social structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Trickett, 2009).

It Takes a Village: Collaborative Action Against Child Poverty

Child poverty is not simply a characteristic of the child, but reflects the broader socioeconomic context in which they grow up. A growing body of empirical research emphasizes that child poverty is complex and multidimensional, requiring an integrated approach to its mitigation (UNICEF, 2020). A critical first step is ensuring adequate family income. Unconditional financial support enables families to consistently provide essentials, such as food, clothing, and safe housing. Financial security reduces daily stress for caregivers and provides a foundation for healthy child development, highlighting the importance of policies that guarantee families a basic level of stability and prevent deprivation from cascading into other life domains (Bastagli et al., 2019; Cooper & Stewart, 2021). Supporting families effectively requires coordinated, multi-domain, child- and family-centered support across healthcare, education, social inclusion, and other life domains (Edwards & Downes, 2013; Evans et al., 2025; Scott & Gong, 2021). Effective support depends on professionals and organizations working together to provide coherent, accessible, and responsive support that strengthens resilience.

Tackling child poverty also demands whole-system involvement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Every subsystem—from caregivers and teachers to policymakers and local organizations—can help reduce risks, improve access to resources, and create opportunities. For instance, a neighbor may offer after-school care; a social worker may recognize that family stress must be addressed before support can be effective; a pediatrician may normalize conversations about financial stress; and a policymaker may adopt a cross-sectoral perspective approach that transcends their own policy domain.

Effective action requires structural and relational support. Structural support includes policies that reduce income inequality, provide stable housing, ensure universal access to healthcare, and promote inclusive education (Edwards & Downes, 2013; Evans et al., 2025; Scott & Gong, 2021). Relational support involves empathetic, participatory, and context-sensitive professional practices, grounded in trust, sustained engagement, and a strengths-based approach. In practice, this may entail coordinated service networks, multidisciplinary teams, and collaborative governance models that integrate the perspectives of families alongside professionals and policymakers (Nooteboom et al., 2021; Scott & Gong, 2021; Van Eck et al., 2024). Community-based initiatives—from local mentorship programs to neighborhood resource hubs—demonstrate the powerful role of social capital in mitigating the impact of poverty (Trickett & Beehler, 2013).

Together, financial security, multi-domain child- and family-centered support, and whole-system involvement create a framework that addresses immediate needs and structural inequalities. As the proverb says, it takes a village to raise a child—and addressing child poverty requires a collaboratively engaged village, working together to create environments in which all children can thrive.

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Note

1. The perspective presented in this paper is shaped primarily by research conducted in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) settings, which may limit its applicability across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

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The Impact of Poverty on Children's Mental Health in Southern Africa: A Scoping Review of Psychosocial, Socioeconomic, and Environmental Influences

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Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing recognition of mental health as an important aspect of an individual's well-being. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest multidimensional poverty rate, estimated at 52.6 percent (World Bank, 2024). The impact of poverty on mental health among children remains an under-researched area in Southern Africa, even though several studies point to its detrimental effects on children's mental well-being. For example, children living in poverty often experience behavioural problems such as aggression, anxiety, social withdrawal, depression, and suicidal ideation (Egba & Ngwakwe, 2015; Karimli et al., 2023). Poverty is perceived as a stressor that exacerbates other adverse influences like family conflict, academic failure, development of inappropriate peer relationships, and a poor sense of belonging (Graham & Maughan, 2025; Li et al., 2020).

This paper adopts a multidimensional view of poverty to analyse the impact of poverty on children's mental health. The recent definition of poverty has been broadened to equip policymakers with tools to measure the various dimensions of poverty (D'Attoma & Matteucci, 2024). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) examines deprivations at both the household and individual levels in areas such as education, health, and standards of living (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). Each individual in a household can be categorised as poor or non-poor depending on the deprivations experienced by the household (Diaz-Bonilla et al., 2024). The MPI is complemented by the Multidimensional Poverty Measure (MPM), which assesses poverty using six indicators mapped into three dimensions, including well-being, standard of living, and basic infrastructure services (Diaz-Bonilla et al., 2024). These assessments of poverty provide a comprehensive view of poverty, highlighting the value of other aspects of well-being which are not measured by income alone. This broader conceptualisation of poverty enables policymakers to prioritise mental health as an integral part of well-being.

Using Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we define a child as any person under the age of eighteen years (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989). This review also recognises the cultural meanings attached to childhood. Given the cultural diversity within African settings, the concept of a child is understood through unique socio-cultural lenses (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014). These culturally specific experiences may differ from global conceptions of childhood and mental health.

The impact of poverty on children's mental health is complex, with different studies highlighting a range of effects. Researchers generally agree that poverty has devastating consequences on mental health (Hatcher et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Karimli et al., 2023; Ridley et al., 2020). However, research on mental health and poverty has primarily focused on adults, and systematic reviews addressing children and adolescents are largely outdated (Zaneva et al., 2022). This review provides a comprehensive analysis of existing literature on the impact of poverty on children's mental health in Southern Africa, highlighting the implications of findings and suggesting areas for further research to effectively support children's mental health in the region. The following section details the methodological approach adopted to map existing evidence on this topic.

Methods

Search Strategy

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guided the review. Two reviewers conducted the

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Children (0-18 years)	Adults only
Concept	Poverty and mental health	Physical health only
Context	Southern African Countries	Studies outside this region
Study Type	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, systematic reviews, grey literature, reports	Editorials, opinion pieces without data
Time frame	2000-2025 (due to limited research in this area)	Studies before 2000
Language	English	Studies written in other languages other than English.

screening of the articles for inclusion, data synthesis, and analysis. Selection of the study sample was guided by the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework. We targeted studies involving children aged 0–18 years that examined the impact of poverty on mental health in Southern Africa; these parameters shaped the following inclusion and exclusion criteria (Refer to Table 1).

Key search terms were ('poverty' OR 'low income') AND ('mental health' OR 'depression' OR 'anxiety' OR 'PTSD' or 'post-traumatic stress disorder') AND ('children' OR 'youth') AND ('Southern Africa' OR 'South Africa' OR 'Zimbabwe' or any other countries in this region). Databases searched included Web of Science, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (AJOL). The initial search focused on related titles and abstracts, which was followed by a full article search. Our database search identified 1145 records; we removed 315 duplicates, leaving 830 records for title and abstract screening, thus excluding 772. Fifty-eight full-text articles were assessed for eligibility; 34 were excluded for being conducted in the wrong region, involving the wrong population, falling outside the targeted timeframe, or examining unrelated outcomes. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion, leading to a final sample of 24 full-text articles. The themes derived from these studies are presented and analysed in the following section.

Results Analysis

This section focuses on the analysis of the study findings, including the analysis of geographic location, participants' age groups, and key themes. Our search reflected that there are a limited number of empirical studies conducted in Southern Africa on the impact of poverty on children's mental health, most of which were conducted in South Africa. Other reviewed studies were conducted in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Namibia, and most of the samples comprised adolescents (12 -18 years), and a few had children in early childhood (mostly 3 -6 years) and middle childhood (6 -12 years). In some cases, the studies focused on adolescents and young adults aged 12 – 25, with some focusing solely on adolescent girls and young women.

Four major themes were identified in relation to the research topic. First was emotional distress, which focused on stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and despair. Second was behavioural and coping, which centred on risk-taking behaviours and conduct problems. Third was psychosocial strain emanating from the caregiver's emotional gap and poor family supervision. Last was trauma-related, exploring PTSD symptoms and long-term emotional scars. Three distinct impact pathways were identified: some manifested as direct consequences of children's exposure to poverty; others emerged indirectly through dynamics within parent-child or caregiver-child relationships, and some were further exacerbated by broader contextual stressors such as HIV/AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic. The term mental health conditions in this context refers to specific clinical presentations such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD, while we occasionally use mental health challenges to acknowledge broader developmental and contextual experiences that may not fit within formal diagnostic categories.

Emotional Distress

Emotional distress, the most prevalent impact of poverty on children, is presented as a direct consequence of stressful, unstable, and often traumatic environments that accompany poverty. Several studies found that children living in poverty have a heightened risk of common mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Mood-related disorders were associated more with the girl child than the boy child. For all children, these mental health conditions were exacerbated by a cascade of factors including chronic stress, social exclusion, exposure to violence, trauma and unstable environments (Petersen et al., 2010; Garman, 2025; Garman et al., 2022a; Hatcher et al., 2019; Cortina et al., 2012; Kleintjes et al., 2010; Duby et al., 2022; Carries et al., 2024; Draper et al., 2024; Folorunsho & Tanga, 2021; Cluver et al., 2013; Cluver, Gardner & Operario, 2009; Samodien et al., 2021; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010). The challenges are particularly acute for vulnerable children in child-headed families, grandparent-headed and orphaned families. Exposure to adverse circumstances makes them feel excluded and unwanted, thus heightening the risk of developing mood-related disorders. Older children may become burdened by overwhelming responsibilities, leading to severe emotional distress, including hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. Children require parental or primary caregiver affection; hence, without adequate adult support, some may exhibit emotional and stress dysregulation. This can be compounded by maternal depression, which is more prevalent in low socioeconomic settings and can impact a child's development from the antenatal period onward. Moreover, the effects of poverty extend to cognitive development. Food insecurity coupled with a lack of adult care can impair a child's cognitive abilities and socio-emotional development, trapping them in a cycle of poor educational achievement and reduced productivity. When a child's

emotional regulation is compromised, it can result in difficulties in school, peer and family relationships, as well as their overall productivity.

Behavioural and Coping Challenges

Poverty can cause behavioural and coping challenges in children by increasing their vulnerability to risky behaviours and maladaptive coping strategies, thus threatening their mental well-being (Marais et al., 2013). Evidence shows that adolescents from low-income backgrounds are at high risk of engaging in substance abuse, high-risk sexual behaviour, and violence (Petersen et al. 2010; Draper et al. 2024; Cortina et al. 2012). These actions are often maladaptive coping strategies that threaten their mental health and future prospects. Exposure to poverty may negatively impact a child's educational journey through loss of focus, lack of concentration in school, and showing behavioural challenges (Chinyoka & Naidu, 2014; Garman, 2025; Chinyoka, 2016). Boys from middle childhood to adolescence have been associated more with behavioural challenges like substance abuse and school dropout, while their female counterparts have been associated more with high-risk sexual behaviours. Some of these problems, for instance, learning disabilities, impulsive behaviour, and risky decision-making, may progress into adulthood. On the contrary, Barbarin and Richter (2001) found weak direct effects of poverty on South African children's emotional and behavioural regulation, hence no effect on mental health. They found that children from materially disadvantaged households had fewer problems with opposition and self-regulation compared to their more advantaged counterparts. However, poverty mostly sets a trajectory for long-term mental health issues, influencing education and later employment outcomes, which are critical for development.

Psychosocial Strain

Lack of caregiver emotional support and adequate family supervision, often found in poverty-stricken households, puts children at increased risk of developing mental health challenges. This can lead to increased exposure to family disruption, violence, and neglect, which are associated with mental health challenges like depression, low self-confidence, and conduct issues (Petersen, 2010; Akande, 2000; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010; Chinyoka, 2016). The burden is worse for orphan-headed, grandparent-headed, or child-headed households with less child supervision, where children may experience social exclusion and stigma leading to psychological distress (Chipare et al., 2021; Folorunsho & Tanga, 2021). Older children (~12 -18) years may be forced to take on adult responsibilities, resulting in overwork and emotional exhaustion. Sometimes this creates desperation that drives them into risky behaviours such as transactional sex, heightening their vulnerability to health issues and psychosocial strain (Cluver et al. 2009; Hatcher et al. 2019; Vorster, 2010).

Poverty may exacerbate the negative impacts of orphanhood, especially AIDS orphanhood and parental AIDS illness (Cluver et al., 2013), which heightens children's risk of mental health challenges (Zimmerman et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed people to poverty, which created an association between household insecurity and depression among adolescent girls and young women (Carries et al., 2024; Cortina et al., 2013). It may also stress parents and caregivers, leading to child neglect, abuse, and substance misuse, contributing to children's psychological distress and strained family relationships (Draper, 2024; Carries et al., 2024). In this context, the psychosocial development of children may be adversely affected by the dual burden of poverty and additional challenges such as HIV/AIDS and COVID-19.

While some studies suggest that community cohesion can mitigate these effects (Barbarin & Richter, 2001), the overall evidence points to the detrimental impact of poverty on a child's psychosocial development. Children grow in a nest of different systems, where forming relationships with significant others is essential. Disruption of this normal developmental process affects their childhood social interactions, which may persist into adulthood, hindering their ability to build and maintain healthy relationships.

Trauma-Related Issues

The cumulative exposure of children to the stress of poverty can lead to long-lasting trauma, hence its association with PTSD. Children's perpetual worry about survival and feelings of hopelessness can create deep-seated psychological scars (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010). Chronic stress and hardship during early development have the potential to cause epigenetic modifications, making children more susceptible to mental health disorders like depression and anxiety later in life (Samodien et al., 2021). In South Africa, the HIV and AIDS pandemic left many children orphaned, thus exposing them to poverty, leading to increased rates of PTSD, depression, and conduct problems, usually mediated by AIDS-related stigma (Cluver et al., 2007; 2008 as cited in Petersen et al., 2010). Poverty can perpetuate cycles of mental health challenges within families, referred to as intergenerational trauma or intergenerational transmission, for instance, transmission of depression or other psychological disorders from parents to adolescents that creates long-lasting cases of mental health challenges, which may limit economic mobility across generations (Kleintjes et al., 2010; Samodien et al., 2021; Garman et al., 2022a; Draper et al., 2024). Chronic poverty has harmful effects on children's mental and emotional well-being as it leads to long-term vulnerability (Garman et al., 2022 b). Carries et al. (2024) also state that persistent socio-economic conditions alongside poor coping strategies can yield longer-term negative effects on young people's mental health that include increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression. Children in poverty, in most cases, are victims of chronic violence, which can lead to negative self-images and challenges in adaptive functioning (Akande, 2000). Early-life malnutrition, especially within the first three years, was found to cause long-term consequences on mental development, which cuts into human capital and economic productivity in adulthood (Vorster, 2010). Overall, when children are exposed to prolonged poverty and hardships, the effects may cause long-term trauma, which disturbs their

mental well-being. Chronic poverty can perpetuate cycles of mental health problems, as parents with their own psychological distress may struggle to provide a stable, supportive environment conducive to child development. The enduring effects of poverty, from food insecurity and feelings of shame to chronic violence and lack of dignity, can have a lasting impact on a child's mental well-being and their expectations for the future.

Conclusions

This scoping review synthesises the existing evidence on the impact of poverty on child mental health within the Southern African region, a context of particular interest in understanding children's diverse developmental issues. It has been confirmed that socioeconomic deprivation constitutes a significant risk factor for adverse psychological consequences like mood disorders, emotional dysregulation, behavioural and conduct problems. This synthesis highlights crucial psychosocial mechanisms, such as caregiver-related stress and maltreatment, through which exposure to poverty negatively impacts a child's mental well-being, leading to long-term developmental psychopathology. Additionally, the compounding effects of other serious stressors like HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, and orphanhood present a complex, multi-risk environment that calls for a socio-ecological approach to intervention.

Profound geographical disparity in the research highlights a critical gap in the literature on poverty and children's mental health in Southern Africa. Studies were predominantly conducted in South Africa, which greatly limits the generalisability of findings to other parts of the region, as poverty is multidimensional and contextualised. This poses a significant obstacle for cross-cultural child developmental studies as it shadows the intricate connection among contextual factors, which include distinct social policies, cultural practices, and economic landscapes in other Southern African countries, which may mediate the relationship between poverty and children's developmental outcomes. To establish a representative and robust evidence base, future research must expand its geographical base.

Departing from a purely deficit-based perspective, this review also identified that the experience of poverty can, in some cases, serve as a context for adaptive development and the cultivation of resilience among children. One study noted that poverty can foster a greater appreciation of parental efforts and promote community cohesion. This finding underscores the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework that considers both risk and protective factors, thus stimulating a diversion from simply identifying deficits to exploring the complex interplay of individual, familial, and community-level assets that support positive developmental pathways.

While this review portrays a strong connection between poverty and child mental health, it also illuminates crucial directions for the field of behavioural development. Future research should prioritise longitudinal and mixed methods designs to unpack the causal pathways in exploring the development of resilience over time. By broadening the geographical focus and adopting a more holistic lens that accounts for both adversity and strength, future studies can significantly contribute to the progression of developmental science and inform the creation of culturally sensitive interventions to mitigate or alleviate the impact of poverty on children's mental health across the Southern African region.

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Global Perspectives on the Interventions and Contexts of Poverty in Children and Youth: Commentary with ISSBD Bulletin Special Section on Poverty

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In this special issue of the ISSBD Bulletin, we bring together evidence regarding interventions to address child poverty and its consequences on a global scale. ISSBD members from Argentina, Benue State, Nigeria, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Zimbabwe introduce evidence from their countries, expanding our understanding of how to conceptualise and address poverty within a culturally sensitive perspective.

Poverty: A Multidimensional Construct

Poverty is not merely a socio-economic condition – it is a developmental crisis that affects children and families in multiple ways, undermining their physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and economic development and wellbeing. Poverty itself is generally recognised as a multidimensional construct (UNICEF, 2021), indicating that basic human needs for food, water, shelter, security, stability, education, health, social connections, respect, and recognition are not met. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an annual measure of acute, overlapping deprivations in health, education, and living standards that people in poverty experience (UNDP, 2014). It complements monetary poverty measures by providing a more complete picture of poverty experienced in over 100 developing countries. The MPI identifies who is poor and how they are poor by using indicators such as nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets such as having a radio, telephone, computer, or refrigerator. According to evidence from 112 countries, 1.1 billion of 6.3 billion people lived in acute multidimensional poverty in 2024, over half of whom were children (UNDP, 2024). Moreover, nearly 40% of the 1.1 billion poor (including 455 million children) live in countries exposed to violent conflict, hindering and even reversing hard-won progress to reduce poverty.

The causes of poverty can be manifold, ranging from locally specific to global events. All studies in this special issue mention economic instability, no investment in local infrastructure, agricultural dependency, limited access to education and healthcare, inadequate policy implementation, and fragmented service systems. For example, evidence from Nigeria suggests that approximately 67.5% of children aged 0-17 live in multidimensional poverty, about 11 million children under the age of five suffer from severe food poverty, and about 4 in every 10 children under the age of five years are stunted due to malnutrition (Chiahemba et al., 2025). Moreover, children are exposed to the experience of war and displacement in addition to global events such as the HIV/AIDS and the Covid-19 pandemic or major recessions (Chiahemba et al., 2025; Chigevenga & Zengeni, 2025), along with political persecution, as for example in Costa Rica (Durán-Delgado, 2025). There is also evidence of harmful cultural practices and beliefs - as for example, regarding gender roles and division of labour, or stigma regarding the issue of mental illness.

Developmental Consequences of Poverty Exposure

Exposure to poverty is associated with chronic stress, malnutrition, educational deprivation, and mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, cognitive impairments, but also orphanhood and trauma-related disorders, as well as limited future career and employment opportunities and social segregation (see, for example, evidence from the scoping review by Chigevenga & Zengeni, 2025). Poverty can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage into the next generation, creating long-lasting challenges. More generally, children's development is shaped by systemic interactions among biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors. Indeed, living in poverty affects the whole family as well as the wider community and

can have lifelong consequences for developmental wellbeing and transfer across generations.

Well-known mechanisms by which poverty can affect children's wellbeing operate via caregiver economic and emotional distress, which can limit effective parenting practices and investment of time, energy, and resources for their children's development (Chigevenga & Zengeni, 2025; Lucassen, 2025). Notably, it is also the children or adolescents themselves who have to take on caregiver roles for their parents, grandparents, and siblings (Chiahemba et al., 2025), where the adverse environment can activate latent vulnerabilities and long-term scaring effects. Persistent exposure to poverty affects the whole family, the wider community, and society at large. However, poverty-induced stress does not necessarily result in fixed deficits. There is persistent evidence of resilience and plasticity in adjustment. Effective functioning in the face of adversity can be fostered through multi-domain support. Moreover, the experience of distress in the face of poverty can reflect an adaptive response (Segretin et al., 2025), potentially leading to actions aimed at challenging and changing those conditions.

Need for Culturally Sensitive, Integrative Approaches

All contributions to this special issue advocate for integrated interventions that address multiple domains simultaneously, including financial support (cash transfers, social welfare), nutrition, early cognitive stimulation, mental health services, parenting, and caregiver training. For example, the Dutch "Mothers of Rotterdam" program exemplifies such an integrated approach, combining debt counseling, health care, and parenting support through multidisciplinary teams (Lucassen, 2025). The Dutch framework stresses that poverty is a systemic issue, requiring coordination across sectors and levels—from microsystems (family, school) to macrosystems (policy, culture). Likewise, the EU-UNICEF-ILO SUSI initiative, as implemented in Benue State, Nigeria, takes an integrated approach (Chiahemba et al., 2025), providing cash transfers to vulnerable households, nutrition interventions, sanitation, education support, and community-based growth monitoring.

Crucially, effective interventions must be contextually grounded. They should respect local beliefs, family structures, and community norms. Ideally, interventions should be co-designed with families and communities, tailored to their priorities, and respectful of their agency. For example, the Istanbul95 home visitation model (Çorapçı et al., 2025) and Costa Rican narrative-based research (Durán-Delgado, 2025) both emphasize trust-building, relational engagement, and cultural competence. Costa Rica's findings reinforce this by showing how institutional exclusion, especially for migrant families, undermines caregiving capacity. Interventions must therefore target structural barriers, not just individual behaviors. For instance, the Istanbul Urban95 initiative (Çorapçı et al., 2025) addresses the living conditions of poor families in urban areas by identifying disadvantaged areas and providing targeted urban planning interventions for underserved families, creating family- and child-friendly environments and exemplifying a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to support vulnerable families.

Another critical player in the fight against poverty and its impact on children's development is schools. School-based intervention programs, such as those implemented in Buenos Aires, Argentina, can illustrate how teachers and parents can be empowered to support cognitive development within familiar routines through curricular adaptations, dyadic play, and computerized activities targeting cognitive development and functioning (Segretin et al., 2025).

Conclusion: Toward a Global, Inclusive Developmental Science

Tackling child poverty is a necessity for building a more equitable society. Growing up in poverty has lifelong impacts on health, educational attainment, and opportunities, with costs that extend to society through increased healthcare, education, and policing expenses. The evidence presented in this special issue underscores that poverty is a multidimensional and context-specific construct, requiring nuanced, culturally sensitive responses. Children's development is shaped by systemic interactions among biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors. While adversity poses risks, it also reveals resilience and adaptive potential – which can be supported through inclusive, participatory approaches. To be effective, interventions must be holistic, integrating economic, social, emotional, and cognitive support, while being participatory and embedded within local systems. Moreover, they must embrace pluralism and decolonize their frameworks, value diverse childhoods, respect local knowledge, and build equitable systems of care. Only then can we build equitable systems of care that support all children and their families to thrive.

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Minutes of the ISSBD Executive Committee (EC) First Lisbon Meeting

Sunday, June 16, 2024, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Room Amalia Rodrigues, Belem Cultural Center, Lisbon, Portugal

Luc Goossens
ISSBD Secretary General

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Present at the meeting

Tina Malti	President
Toni Antonucci	Past President
Luc Goossens	Secretary General
Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck	Treasurer
Julie Bowker	Membership Secretary
Antonella Marchetti	EC Member
Liqui Zhu	EC Member
Rita Zukauskiene	EC Member
Kristin Ajrouch	EC Member
Frosso Motti	EC Member
Manuela Verissimo	EC Member (joined later on)
Cinzia Di Dio	ECS Representative (joined later on)
Karen Castillo	Membership Manager
Patrick Njoroge	Communications Manager

Opening by the President Tina Malti

Tina Malti opens the meeting and welcomes all members of the Executive Committee. All present briefly introduce themselves.

Approval of the Minutes of the EC meeting (online) of November 3, 2023

The minutes are approved unanimously.

Report of the President Tina Malti

The President summarizes all the recent achievements in the area of communication and internal organization of the Society that are in line with her vision to unite developmentalists in a science that cares. A new contract for IJBD was signed with SAGE, Karen Castillo (Membership manager) and Patrick Njoroge (Communications manager) were hired to assist with the professionalization of the Society, and ISSBD has taken control of membership registration through its new website with the assistance of Jan Boom. Two new committees were created, that is, the Optimizing Capacity Committee and the Global Social Policy Committee. The first award holders were selected for the new ISSBD 2 x 2 grants, which are meant to promote collaboration between early-career scholars from different continents and from two different disciplines. A regional workshop (in Uganda), an international workshop (in Italy), and a webinar were organized. Finally, grant proposals are currently being prepared by the President for applications with the Jacobs Foundation and the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF).

Report of the Secretary General Luc Goossens

Luc Goossens was involved in the daily running of the Society. He compiled the book of Reports for the biennial meeting in Lisbon and summarized the contents and discussions of the five online EC meetings held since the biennial meeting in Rhodes in the minutes, which were sent out for publication in the ISSBD Bulletin. In close collaboration with Membership Manager Karen Castillo, he also supervised the elections held in 2023 through the Society's new website. Frosso Motti was elected as President-elect (2024-2026) and will later serve as President (2026-2030). Cinzia Di Dio, René Veenstra, and Pamela Wadende were elected as members of the Executive Committee (2024-2030), and Marvin Kapenda and Tripthi Kathuria were elected as Early Career Scholars (ECS) representatives to the EC (2024-2028). Luc Goossens also visited the conference venue in Lisbon in 2023 as a member of the Conference Planning Committee. The

Secretary General expresses his gratitude to President Tina Malti and the other officers of the Society, that is, Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck and Membership Secretary Julie Bowker, for the efficient and thoroughly enjoyable collaboration during the last two years.

Report of the Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck

The Treasurer gives a brief overview of the financial situation of the Society based on the latest report available (i.e., for the fiscal year 2023). ISSBD's finances are in good shape, including solid interest and investment returns in 2023 and continued income from SAGE for our flagship journal. On December 31, 2023, the total financial assets of the Society (i.e., the two investment accounts, the checking and savings accounts, and the two Certificates of Deposit) totalled $ 4,475,263.91. The Treasurer offers recommendations for cautious use of the Society's financial assets to fund its activities, such as regional workshops and support for early career scholars to attend the biennial meeting. She also states that we have to continue to work on growing our membership in ISSBD. On behalf of the entire EC, the President thanks the Treasurer for all her hard work for the Society.

Report of the Membership Secretary Julie Bowker

Julie Bowker points out that the number of regional coordinators has increased to 30 with the addition of regional representatives in the Middle East, the Netherlands, and Brazil. ISSBD currently has 930 members from 73 different countries. Increasing and retaining membership will remain a top priority. Regional coordinators will be contacted for ideas that ensure that the ISSBD community remains vibrant and connected, and new regional coordinators will be recruited. The President thanks Membership Treasurer Julie Bowker and Membership Coordinator Karen Castillo for their relentless efforts regarding membership in ISSBD.

Publications and Communication

Report of IJBD Editor Jennifer Lansford

Editor Jen Lansford states that IJBD is in good shape. The impact factor looks good, and the journal is ranked in the first and highest quartile (Q1) for all relevant areas. Three special issues are currently underway, and all of the keynote speakers will be invited to submit their presentations for publication in the journal. The planned collaboration with the Child and Family Blog provides a different way to communicate research findings to a lay audience. President Tina Malti thanks Editor Lansford for all her great work for the Society.

Report of the publisher SAGE by Livia Melandri

Livia Melandri presents the essential points of the extensive report she submitted to the EC. The total number of submissions for IJBD has increased, the time to the first decision has decreased, and the acceptance rate (at 20%) is good. Regional diversity is high as authors from many countries submit manuscripts to the journal. Livia also describes the changing nature of the publishing market, where open access is increasing. The EC members engage in a lively discussion about the pros and cons and the operational details of Open Science. Livia also points out that the transition to the new editorial team and the website has been smooth and pleasant, and she thanks everyone involved, including Editor Jen Lansford, Membership Manager Karen Castillo, and Jan Boom. She concludes by stating that it is fantastic to work with ISSBD. President Tina Malti thanks Livia Melandri and emphasizes that we, as a scientific society, are very grateful to our favorite partner, SAGE.

Report on the ISSBD Bulletin by Editor Karina Weichold

Karina Weichold states that the ISSBD Bulletin, which focuses on seminal topics in life span development in a cultural context, is flourishing. It gives the opportunity to publish and disseminate within our ISSBD community. It is proposed to open it up to a wider audience. The EC discusses this option and votes unanimously to make the ISSBD Bulletin open access. This approach and the addition of a digital object identifier (DOI), if possible, will make publishing in the Bulletin more attractive. The collaboration between the Bulletin and IJBD has been strengthened as a special issue of our flagship journal will bring together stand-out articles submitted earlier in the Bulletin. A new copy editor will have to be found. President Tina Malti thanks Karina Weichold for her continuing efforts to ensure that our ISSBD Bulletin flourishes.

Report of the Publications Committee

Noah Webster and Denis Gerstorf, co-chairs of the Publications Committee, summarize the report they submitted to the EC. They provide an update of (a) their efforts to obtain a digital object identifier (DOI) for the contributions to the ISSBD Bulletin and (b) the activities for the three publications of the Society: IJBD, the ISSBD Bulletin, and the e-Newsletter. Steve Anatsa (who also attends part of the EC meeting) has been appointed as the new editor of the ISSBD e-Newsletter. The co-chairs also point out that some members of their committee are nearing the end of their term and will have to be replaced. President Tina Malti thanks the co-chairs for all their hard work and coordination efforts in the Publications Committee.

Report of the Communications Committee

Pamela Wadende, Acting Chair of the Communications Committee, gives an overview of the activities of that committee. A new ISSBD website was developed, a Communications Manager (Patrick Njoroge) was hired, and nine e-newsletters have been circulated since July

2023. The Communications Manager also facilitated the creation of new social media accounts on YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn. The new chair will be Dawn England.

ISSBD Biennial Meetings

Report on the 2024 Lisbon Conference by Manuela Verissimo

Maria Verissimo, host of the biennial meeting, gives a brief overview of the event. The conference is a great success. A total of 1,560 people from many countries were registered. There are 119 symposia and 1,100 posters. The visa process will have to be handled in a different way for future conferences, as there were some problems with access to the Schengen area and practical problems in some countries (e.g., a limited number of interview slots when applying for a visa). The President thanks Manuela for all her hard work for the biennial meeting.

Bid for the 2026 Biennial Conference (Songdo, South Korea)

Dr. Hyoun Kim (Yonsei University, Seoul) joins the meeting and presents a bid for the ISSBD biennial meeting to be held in Songdo (close to the capital city of Seoul) in South Korea from June 21 to 25, 2026. The bidding book that she distributes among the EC members looks very professional, and the EC unanimously decides to accept the Korean bid. Several members offer suggestions to further improve the conference plan, including the proposed budget. A Conference Planning Committee will travel to Songdo in Korea in 2025 to visit the conference venue and assist with the organization. Members of this committee will be President Tina Malti, Secretary General Luc Goossens, and experienced EC members Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck (Treasurer), Rita Zukauskiene, Frosso Motti (President-elect), and Manuela Verissimo (all of whom previously organized biennial meetings), and Membership Secretary and chair of the Early Career Scholars Travel Grants Julie Bowker.

Committees

Developing Country Fellowships (DFC) Committee

Peter Smith, chair of the Developing Country Fellowships (DFC) Committee, poses three questions to the EC members. He wonders whether the name of the program ought to be changed (e.g., by replacing 'Developing Country' with 'Majority World'), asks for authorization to continue with the program, and suggests that a new chair or co-chair be appointed for the program. The EC agrees that a discussion could be held about the name of the program, votes unanimously to continue with the program, which is clearly very successful, and encourages Peter to find a co-chair to assist him. President Tina Malti expresses the Society's gratefulness to Peter Smith for his continued dedication to this important program for young researchers.

Regional Workshops Committee

Suman Verma, co-chair of the Regional Workshops Committee, presents an overview of the committee's activities since the Rhodes meeting. Detailed guidelines for regional workshop proposals and a template for such proposals are now available on the Society's website. These proposals have to be submitted at least six months in advance of the actual workshop, and there are now two application dates. The committee will try out and compare different types of workshops. The ongoing African model has been very successful in increasing membership, capacity building, and networking in that part of the world, but other models may be more suitable in different regions of the globe. We also have to prioritize regions where resources are limited. President Tina Malti thanks co-chair Suman Verma for all her diligent efforts to encourage and streamline the organization of regional workshops.

Awards Committee

An overview of the 2024 award winners (for the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award, the Distinguished Scientific Award for the Applications of Behavioral Development Theory and Research, the Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Research and Theory in Behavioral Development, the Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Young Scholar Award) is presented to the EC members. Silvia Koller, Chair of the Awards Committee, who could not attend the Lisbon meeting, announces that she has finished her term and thanks ISSBD for all the support she enjoyed. As a result, a new chair will have to be appointed.

Finance Committee

Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck, Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, has submitted a brief report to the EC about the activities of the Finance Committee and its investment strategy. She emphasizes that Rick Burdick (ISSBD Finance Officer) is extremely important for the Society.

Early Career Scholars (ECS) Travel Grants Committee

Julie Bowker, Chair of the Early Career Scholars (ECS) Travel Grants, has submitted a report on the 2024 round of travel grants to the biennial meeting for young researchers. The committee has received a record number of 228 applications (compared to 121 for the previous round in 2022). Following extensive review by the committee members, funding was offered to 55 early-career scholars from low and middle-income countries and 17 such scholars from high-income countries. A total of 41 unfunded early-career scholars (who had to pay a small fee to attend the preconference workshop) were added. The chair thanks the members of her committee and emphasizes that Membership Manager Karen Castillo was a great help to her. The entire EC is impressed by the amount of work performed by the ECS Travel Grant Committee, and on behalf of the entire Society, President Tina Malti thanks Julie Bowker and her committee for all their hard work.

Early Career Scholars (ECS) Committee

Cinzia Di Dio, Chair of the ECS Committee, has submitted an extensive report on the activities of her Committee since the Rhodes meeting. New members were recruited for the Committee, and a survey was conducted to better understand the needs and expectations of early-career scholars within the Society. Members of the Committee were also actively involved in the organization of an international workshop on "Child Well-Being in Formal and Informal Care and Education" in Milan (Italy). The Committee also organized a webinar, "Meet the Founders" on Jacobs Foundation research opportunities and fellowship programs, and a panel discussion on "Post-PhD Career Path: Consultancy and Research Positions". Finally, the Committee was also actively involved in the organization of activities at the Lisbon meeting that are specifically designed for young researchers (e.g., preconference workshops). President Tina Malti thanks Cinzia and her Committee for all their efforts aimed at fostering a vibrant and supportive international community of early-career scholars within our Society.

ISSBD Fellows

Marcel van Aken describes the ISSBD Fellows program and suggests ways to ensure that it is clear what a fellowship means and that fellows are involved more systematically in the daily workings of the Society. The criteria for the Fellowships could be included on the Society's website, and Meet the Fellow activities, or an ISSBD Fellowship reception could be organized at future biennial meetings to allow young members to interact in an informal way with these distinguished members of our Society.

Marcel also describes the Preconference Workshop program, which he coordinates in close collaboration with Julie Bowker, Chair of the Early Career Scholar (ECS) Travel Grant Committee. There were workshops on Publishing, Intervention, Open Science, Peer Relations, and Transdisciplinary Research (each with 25 participants). President Tina Malti thanks Marcel van Aken for all his hard work for the Fellowship program and congratulates both Marcel and Julie on their successful program of Preconference Workshops.

Membership Committee

Astrid Poorthuis, chair of the Membership Committee, reminds the EC that the rules regarding reduced membership for low- and middle-income countries have been adapted to be in line with the most recent list of World Bank categories. The Membership Committee will also meet during the Lisbon meeting to discuss the possibility of cash payment of membership dues at the conference. Finally, Astrid suggests ways to increase the membership of the Society by making the benefits of being a member more pronounced, by encouraging people to become members when registering for the conference, and offering increased networking opportunities (e.g., through a Membership Directory). President Tina Malti thanks Astrid Poorthuis for all her sustained efforts to retain and increase membership in the Society and to make membership benefits more visible.

Collaborations and Strategic Alliances

Working Plan to provide technical assistance to ISSBD

Jan Boom is currently in charge of the membership section of the new ISSBD website, which runs smoothly and is generally appreciated within the Society. Based on his experiences with other learned societies (i.e., the Association of Moral Education, AME, and the Jean Piaget Society, JPS), he offers to extend the use of his system to the actual running of ISSBD's biennial meetings. This new system obviously has a number of advantages (e.g., increases in the operational integration of all our activities within the Society and associated gains in efficiency and transparency). However, adopting the system implies revolutionary changes in the way the Society currently operates and requires a strong commitment from the EC, which would have to set up a task force to facilitate the transition to the new extended system. The EC members engage in a lively discussion of the pros and cons of the new system, but they do not arrive at a definitive conclusion. Jan Boom will prepare a more detailed plan for the extension of his system, which will be discussed at one of the next EC meetings. President Tina Malti thanks Jan Boom for all of his work on the membership section of the new ISSBD website and his plans to extend the use of this system in the future.

Contribution to the International Consortium of Developmental Science Societies (ICDSS)

Past-President Toni Antonucci has informed the EC that ICDSS asks its constituent members (i.e., learned societies) to contribute financially to this umbrella organization of developmental science societies. This contribution is set at 5% of the annual membership fees. Following a discussion, there is an agreement that we are very enthusiastic about the ICDSS initiative, but that the benefits for the Society are less clear at the moment. As a result, we would be willing to pay if there are clear benefits to our being a member of ICDSS. The EC votes in favor of this motion with one abstention.

Collaboration with the Child and Family Blog

Duncan Fisher, Editor of the Child and Family Blog, presents a brief overview of the workings and the history of the blog. Amanda Morris, who is a contributor to the blog, is also present. These representatives of the blog see great potential in collaboration with a global partner such as ISSBD to create a program of science dissemination together and find funding. President Tina Malti thanks Duncan for the proposal and thinks that it has to be aligned with our own objectives. These aims are that we move more into research-practice collaboration and that our young people receive training in science communication directed at a general audience. The EC members extensively discuss potential ways to reach these aims. A more detailed proposal for collaboration between ISSBD and the

Child and Family Blog will be developed and will be discussed at one of the next meetings of the EC.

Collaboration with the Jacobs Foundation

Alexandra Gerber and Gelgia Fetz (Jacobs Foundation) present an overview of the new LEARN initiative (which stands for Leverage Empower Advance Research Network). This is a program for early-career scholars in the Global South (i.e., Ghana and Colombia). It aims to strengthen local capacity, build research networks, and apply research skills to policy and practice. Based on their experience with earlier collaborative projects, the Jacobs Foundation sees ISSBD as an interesting partner for this new initiative. President Tina Malti thanks the Jacobs Foundation for all the support that ISSBD has received in the past and welcomes new opportunities for collaboration. She is going to connect with the Foundation to work out the details of such a collaborative effort.

Collaboration with the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF)

Ellen Morgan, Principal Adviser of the Global Innovations for Character Development Initiative of the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF), offers some information on their funding program on human flourishing. This program wants to build research capacity in low and middle-income countries. President Tina Malti thanks Ellen for her summary and is working out the details of an application for this program. She finds the new program very exciting, and she is convinced that many young scholars within ISSBD will be interested in the opportunities provided by this new funding scheme.

Due to time constraints, the discussion about the reimbursement policy for EC members will be held at the next EC meeting, and a vote will then be held on this policy.

Minutes of the ISSBD Executive Committee (EC) Second Lisbon Meeting

Thursday, June 20, 2024, 1:15 PM – 2:15 PM Jorge de Sena Room, Belem Cultural Center, Lisbon, Portugal

Luc Goossens
ISSBD Secretary General

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Present at the meeting

Tina Malti	President
Frosso Motti	President-Elect
Luc Goossens	Secretary General
Antonella Marchetti	EC Member
Liqui Zhu	EC Member
Cinzia Di Dio	EC Member
Pamela Wadende	EC Member
Tripti Kathuria	ECS Representative

Welcome and Opening of the Meeting

President Tina Malti welcomes all of the members to the meeting.

Brief Introduction of Newly Appointed EC Members

The new members, Pamela Wadende and Tripti Kathuria, briefly introduce themselves. The President thanks outgoing member Antonella Marchetti for all her work for the Society as EC member and organizer of the workshop in Milan in 2023. She will continue to serve as regional representative for Italy. The incoming President-Elect, Frosso Motti, briefly describes her involvement with ISSBD as organizer of a regional workshop on the island of Syros in 2017 and the biennial meeting on the island of Rhodes in 2022.

Strategic Development and Progress

President Tina Malti presents a brief update based on her extensive contacts with ISSBD members and other partners during the Lisbon conference.

Following a meeting with the two staff members who were hired to professionalize the Society in the areas of membership and communication, the President is in favor of extending their contracts for another year. The EC unanimously approves this proposal.

Jan Boom's plan for the extended use by ISSBD of his membership system, including conference management, will be discussed at the next EC meeting.

Regional workshops will be held in 2025 (i.e., the off-year in between biennial meetings). The next deadline for proposals for such workshops will be in September. At the next online meeting, the EC will decide which of the proposals will be supported financially.

Both the Jacobs Foundation and the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF) still want to work with us, despite important changes in their objectives. The Jacobs Foundation no longer supports person-focused capacity building as it did in the past. In their new LEARN initiative, they now focus on networking opportunities and building research skills through investment in research themes in Ghana and Colombia. The Jacobs Foundation wants to fund activities if they are in line with these new objectives. The Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF) offers research grants in the area of character development (which is defined very broadly) to pairs of researchers (which is similar to our own 2 x 2 grants). President Tina Malti will prepare applications for both foundations. The details of these applications will be discussed at the next EC meeting.

EC Meetings and Communication

The next virtual (or online) EC meeting will be held in October, and we will meet online every 3 to 4 months. The Conference Planning Committee will offer practical and financial support to the local organizers of the 2026 biennial

meeting through virtual meetings. The new Chair of the Early Career Scholar (ECS) Committee, Federico Manzi, has been added to that committee. It is suggested that the Conference Planning Committee will travel to Toronto (Canada) in 2025 to attend the conference of the Society for Research on Adolescence (SRA). It is further suggested that a full-day EC meeting will be held in Toronto, too. At the next (online) EC meeting, a vote will be taken to determine whether the in-person meeting of the EC will be held in Toronto and whether the Conference Planning Committee will also meet in Toronto. Meanwhile, it has been established that there will be no SRA conference in Toronto in 2025. So, both meetings could be held in Seoul, South Korea.

In an effort to increase the cohesion within the Society, the regional coordinators and the committee chairs will meet online. In this way, new types of synergies can be created.

Other Issues

Some of the committee chairs have to be replaced, preferably by mid-career rather than senior scholars. Suman Verma wants to be replaced as chair of the Regional Workshops Committee. Marcel van Aken could be approached to become the new chair of the Awards Committee. Noah Webster and Denis Gersdorf will continue as chairs of the Publications Committee. The potential conflict of interest regarding Jennifer Lansford's involvement with both ISSBD and SRCD is a sensitive issue, and we have to monitor that situation.

President Tina Malti thanks Manuela Verissimo for her excellent organization of the Lisbon conference, which was very successful.

After 10 years, our collaboration with the Jacobs Foundation in supporting post-Ph.D. researchers come to an end. Toni Antonucci and Anne Petersen will prepare a final report on this successful program. We will have to invest $ 100,000 of our own money into similar types of support, and selection criteria for this new cohort of young researchers will have to be defined.

Closure of the Meeting

President Tina Malti states that we, as a Society, have to emphasize our uniqueness and our strengths vis-à-vis other organizations and initiatives. She closes the meeting and wishes all of the EC members a safe trip back home.

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Minutes of the ISSBD Executive Committee (EC) Meeting

October 28, 2024, 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM EST (Eastern Standard Time) (online)

Luc Goossens

ISSBD Secretary General

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Present at the Meeting

Tina Malti	President
Frosso Motti	President-Elect
Luc Goossens	Secretary General
Julie Bowker	Membership Secretary
Liqui Zhu	EC Member
Kristin Ajrouch	EC Member
Marc Bornstein	EC Member
Silvia Koller	EC Member
Manuela Verissimo	EC Member
Cinzia di Dio	EC Member
René Veenstra	EC Member
Pamela Wadende	EC Member
Marvin Kapenda	Early Career Scholar (ECS) Representative
Tripti Kathuria	Early Career Scholar (ECS) Representative

Welcome and Approval of the Minutes of the EC Meetings of June 2024 (Lisbon)

President Tina Malti welcomes everyone to the meeting. The new EC members – René Veenstra, Cinzia di Dio, and Pamela Wadende (regular EC members), and Marvin Kapenda and Tripti Kathuria (Early Career Scholars (ECS) Representatives) – are especially welcomed by the president. The minutes of the in-person Executive Committee (EC) meetings on June 16, 2024, and June 20, 2024 (at the Biennial Meeting in Lisbon, Portugal) are approved unanimously.

President's Update

President Tina Malti gives an update on two new grant schemes in collaboration with two foundations that the Society has good relationships with. The Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF) has granted USD 100,000 for the Care Everywhere grants (which are like an extension of our 2 x 2 grants) for projects related to the development of character strengths. A committee will be created for this type of grant, and a call for proposals will be posted on the Society's website. (b) The Jacobs Foundation has granted CHF 100,000 (roughly USD 110,000) for Nurturing Learning Minds projects that are to be linked to the Foundation's LEVANTE program (about learning variability) and are meant to increase research capacity in Ghana and Colombia.

The EC members agree that this is great news for ISSBD. The new type of collaboration with the Jacobs Foundation offers great opportunities, as we have a regional representative in both Ghana and Colombia. The EC members thank President Tina Malti for all her hard work on these two collaborative grant schemes and congratulate her on her successful negotiations with both foundations.

Regional Workshop Proposals

The Regional Workshop Committee has received four proposals for regional workshops. The Society's financial planning (proposed by Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck) entails that we can support two workshops for USD 50,000 each per year. Two of the proposals for workshops to be held in Lebanon and South Africa are in good shape.

The EC members discuss these proposals and agree that the Lebanon proposal is strong and highly focused and could increase ISSBD membership in that particular region. They suggest, in view of the tense situation in that country, that the organizers consider the possibility of holding the workshop in another country in the region (if the current tensions do not subside) or holding a hybrid meeting. The South African proposal is very broad, and the budget seems to be rather high. The organizers will be invited to submit a more focused proposal with a lower budget (within the limits set out in the Society's financial planning). With these modifications in place, the EC takes two separate votes on the Lebanon and South Africa proposals, respectively. Both proposals are approved unanimously. All of the teams that submitted proposals will receive feedback through the Regional Workshops Committee, and teams that did not receive approval will be encouraged to resubmit. Other teams will be invited to submit proposals for regional workshops to be held in 2025-2026. It would be a good strategic move to organize a regional

workshop in South America (e.g., Argentina) to boost membership in that particular part of the world.

Collaboration with Child and Family Blog

The EC discusses two proposals regarding the Society's collaboration with the Child and Family Blog, that is, (a) a proposal by the Child and Family Blog team to disseminate the findings of 12 IJBD articles through the Blog across one year and (b) a proposal by Julie Bowker and her committee to organize a series of webinars on how to present scientific findings on the Blog. Regarding the latter proposal, the EC members suggest that the Early Career Scholars (ECS) representatives join the planning meetings for the webinars and that we aim to establish a connection with the new Jacobs Foundation project. Regarding the former proposal, the EC members suggest that we start the project with a revised budget, that we encourage translation efforts in languages other than English, and that we evaluate the project after a year. With these modifications in place, the EC takes two separate votes on the proposals. Both proposals are approved unanimously.

Collaboration with Developmental Scientists for Climate Action (DEvSCA)

The EC members discuss a proposal for collaboration with Developmental Scientists for Climate Action (DEvSCA) and see it as the beginning of a conversation with this group. There is a lot of enthusiasm and support for the proposed collaboration, and we can start up several of the projects mentioned in the proposal. EC members Pamela Wadende and Marvin Kapenda, who are also members of DEvSCA, can give this feedback to the group. One possibility could be to organize a preconference on climate change at the next Biennial Meeting in 2026.

Reimbursement Rules for EC members

The EC members discuss a draft by Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck on rules regarding reimbursements for EC members attending the EC meetings at the biennial conferences and other in-person EC meetings. Procedural details have to be added to the document. It is important to mention explicitly that all declarations of costs incurred have to be sent to Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck and that all requests will be handled by Rick Burdick. EC member Manuela Verissimo, organizer of the Biennial Meeting in Lisbon, insists that the document also specifies explicitly that the EC members or other beneficiaries of ISSBD grants do not contact the conference organizer. The document will be finalized at the next EC meeting.

In-Person Meeting EC 2025 and Conference Planning Committee: Visit to South Korea

At an earlier EC meeting, it was decided to resume the Society's tradition to hold an in-person EC meeting in the 'off years' (i.e., between biennial conferences). Following some debate, the EC decides to combine this EC meeting for 2025 with the site visit of the conference venue in South Korea by the Conference Planning Committee (for which a large section of the EC has volunteered to act as active members). Such a combined event is an established tradition in other learned societies (e.g., the European Association for Developmental Psychology; EADP).

For the EC, this will be a hybrid meeting so that the members who cannot travel to South Korea can attend the meeting online. The costs for the site visit by the Conference Planning Committee are typically covered by the Organizing Committee of the Biennial Meeting. However, the extra costs incurred because of the new, expanded format of the event will be covered by ISSBD. The combined EC meeting/conference site visit will take place in June 2025 (to be discussed with conference organizer Dr. Hyoun Kim). Secretary General Luc Goossens will come up with a formal proposal for the combined EC meeting and conference venue visit.

Early Career Scholars (ECS) Initiatives

EC member Cinzia di Dio gives a brief overview of the initiatives for Early Career Scholars (ECS) scheduled for 2025. She announces the start of the EC Mentoring Program. A list of seniors who are willing to provide support to young scholars will be made available on the Society's website, and then the process of matching those mentors to young scholars will be initiated. The EC members are very supportive of this new initiative and discuss the details of this scheme. Membership Manager Karen Castillo and Communications Manager Patrick Njoroge can provide practical assistance.

Next EC Meeting and Adjournment

The next EC meeting will be held online on February 17, 2025, from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM (Eastern Standard Time) (i.e., Toronto, Canada time), which translates into 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM Central European Time (CET) (i.e., Brussels, Belgium time). President Tina Malti closes the meeting.

Minutes of the ISSBD Executive Committee (EC) Meeting

February 17, 2025, 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM EST (Eastern Standard Time) (online)

Luc Goossens

ISSBD Secretary General

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Present at the Meeting

Tina Malti	President
Frosso Motti	President-Elect
Luc Goossens	Secretary General
Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck	Treasurer
Julie Bowker	Membership Secretary
Liqi Zhu	EC Member
Rita Zukauskiene	EC Member
Kristin Ajrouch	EC Member
Manuela Verissimo	EC Member
Cinzia di Dio	EC Member
René Veenstra	EC Member
Pamla Wadende	EC Member
Marvin Kapenda	Early Career Scholar (ECS) Representative
Jan Boom	Manager Membership Section ISSBD website
Karen Castillo	Membership Manager
Patrick Njoroge	Communications Manager

Welcome and Approval of the Minutes of the EC meetings of October 28, 2024

President Tina Malti welcomes everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the online Executive Committee (EC) meeting on October 28, 2024, are approved unanimously.

ISSBD 2026 Biennial Meeting

Dr. Hyoun Kim (Yonsei University, South Korea), host of the 2026 Biennial meeting in Seoul (South Korea), gives an overview of the preparations for the conference (including the sponsors, local funding, and the Professional Conference Organizer (PCO)). Hyun Joo Song (Yonsei University) will act as co-organizer of the conference. The Local Organizing Committee (LOC) will be finalized by the end of February 2025.

The EC members offer a series of suggestions regarding the timeline for the conference (including the timing of the first announcement and the deadline for submissions), invited speakers, and the social program. They also discuss the challenges involved in organizing hybrid meetings (including the financial implications and time differences). Efforts should be undertaken to provide affordable housing for students in line with ISSBD's long-standing tradition of providing financial support to our junior members. In line with another tradition of the Society, the Conference Planning Committee will travel to Seoul (South Korea) in the first week of June for a site visit to the conference venue.

Regional Workshop Proposals

A more focused proposal has been submitted for the Regional Workshop in South Africa, and the budget now seems reasonable in view of the planned number of attendants. It might be feasible to effectively hold the planned Regional Workshop in Lebanon (approved at the previous EC meeting) in that country in view of the current situation in the region. Relocation to the neighboring countries of Egypt or Jordan no longer seems necessary. Two Regional Workshops co-sponsored by ISSBD and the Jacobs Foundation will be organized in the near future, that is, one in 2025 in Ghana and the other in 2026 in Colombia. New proposals for regional workshops can be submitted by the next deadline, which is mid-March 2025. The EC will have a vote regarding these new proposals over e-mail.

ISSBD Themed Meeting in 2026

President-Elect Frosso Motti introduces a proposal for a themed meeting on "LGBTQ+ Child and Adolescent Development, Health, and Rights" co-chaired by experts on the topic (Jessica Fish, Laura Baams, Salvatore Ioverno, and Stephen Russell). This meeting, which intends to bring the findings from developmental science to the table in the ongoing societal discussion on this topic, will be a joint event by ISSBD and SRCD, organized in Europe in 2026 after the Biennial Meeting in Seoul. The conference will fund itself

through registration fees from the attendees, but ISSBD will provide USD 10,000 as seed money. Several EC members emphasize that this is indeed an important societal issue. The EC discusses the optimal timing of the event relative to our biennial meeting in South Korea in the same year. The members further agree that a clear set of guidelines regarding themed meetings should be available on the ISSBD website so that all members can submit proposals for such meetings. Treasurer Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck volunteers to create such a set of guidelines. The proposal to provide funding for the 2026 themed meeting has been approved by the majority of the EC. The proposal to create guidelines for themed meetings to be posted on the ISSBD website is approved unanimously by the EC.

ISSBD Elections

Secretary General Luc Goossens announces that several members of the EC are rotating off in 2026 after having served a six-year term (2020-2026). A Secretary-General, Treasurer, and Membership Secretary, as well as three regular EC members will have to be elected in the Fall of 2025 to serve a six-year term (2026-2032). Several EC members emphasize that this will be an important change for ISSBD. The candidates for these positions need to realize that being a member of the EC is a serious engagement and that they will have to devote quite some time to the Society. In a first step, the Secretary General will invite nominations from the EC members and the Committee Chairs. In a second step, all members of the Society will be invited to submit nominations through the ISSBD website.

ISSBD Membership Category System

Membership Secretary Julie Bowker proposes a change in the ISSBD Membership Category System. Currently, the definition of Early Career Scholars (ECS) within ISSBD includes students, and this situation creates confusion. The Membership Secretary therefore suggests collapsing the ECS and student categories, but only for members from high-income countries. This proposal is approved unanimously by the EC.

ISSBD Membership Directory Issues

Membership manager Karen Castillo explains that ISSBD used to have an online Membership Directory, but this membership service was discontinued. Several members have indicated that they miss this traditional resource and want to bring it back to the ISSBD website. The EC members engage in a lively discussion about what type of information should be included in the directory and who should have access to it. As we need to be in line with current legislation about data protection and privacy, it seems advisable to seek legal advice about this topic. The proposal to bring back the Membership Directory is approved unanimously by the EC.

ISSBD Conference Registration and Submission System

At a previous EC meeting in Lisbon in June 2024, Jan Boom, Manager of the Membership Registration System on the ISSBD website, explained that this system can be expanded so that it can also handle registration and submission of abstracts for our biennial meetings. He gives a PowerPoint presentation about the many advantages of such an expanded system for both the users (i.e., the membership) and the organization (i.e., ISSBD). Moving to this system would imply drastic changes, as we would no longer work with a Professional Conference Organizer (PCO) for our biennial meetings, which would result in a substantial reduction in the registration fees. Membership manager Karen Castillo gives a brief demonstration of the registration system.

The EC members engage in a lively discussion about this proposed extension of the membership registration system. There are concerns about the complexity, potential costs (e.g., currency conversion charges), and flexibility of the proposed system (e.g., whether conference organizers can opt out of the system). The general impression is that it is currently premature to take a decision about the expansion of the system. The discussion will be continued in the Conference Planning Committee. On behalf of the entire EC, President Tina Malti expresses her gratitude to Jan Boom for all his work. She emphasizes that the EC is well aware of the time pressure and will take a decision soon.

Collaboration with Developmental Scientists for Climate Action (DEvSCA)

As a follow-up to the discussion at the previous EC meeting, the EC discusses a number of specific ways to collaborate with Developmental Scientists for Climate Action (DEvSCA). EC member Pamela Wadende, who is also a member of DEvSCA, leads the discussion about this topic on the agenda. Following a lively discussion, some hesitation about organizing hybrid meetings, and an overview of the current organization of the preconference workshops at the biennial meetings, the EC lands on the proposal to organize another preconference workshop on climate change. This proposal is approved unanimously by the EC. The details will be discussed at the next EC meetings.

Early Career Scholars (ECS) Initiatives

EC member Cinzia di Dio announces that the ECS committee is ready to start with the pilot of their ECS Mentoring Program with six mentors (The term “mentor” is now replaced with the term “advisor”). She outlines the various steps in this pilot and indicates that the committee has prepared some guidelines and restrictions to protect the advisors. On behalf of the entire EC, President Tina Malti thanks Cinzia for her nice overview of the new ECS Advisor Program and all of the hard work that she invested in the development of this program over the past few years as Chair of the ECS Committee.

Next EC Meeting and Adjournment

The next EC meeting will be held in person in Songdo (close to Seoul, South Korea) as two half-day meetings on Monday, June 2, and Tuesday, June 3, 2025. All of the EC members will arrive on Sunday, June 1, 2025. The Conference Planning Committee will also meet in person in Songdo on Wednesday, June 4, and Thursday, June 5, 2025, with the conference host and co-host, and will visit the conference venue. The costs for the site visit by the Conference Planning Committee will be covered by the Organizing Committee of the Biennial Meeting. The costs incurred for the EC meeting will be covered by ISSBD. EC members who cannot attend the EC meeting in person will be able to follow the meeting online. All EC members are kindly asked to inform President Tina Malti and Secretary General Luc Goossens whether they will attend the EC meeting in South Korea in person or online at their earliest convenience and by early April at the latest. President Tina Malti closes the meeting.

In Memoriam: Professor Jaana Katariina "Kata" Salmela-Aro (1962–2025)

Frosso Motti[1], Brett Laursen[2], Jacquelynne Eccles[3]

[1]National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
[2]Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA
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Professor Jaana Katariina "Kata" Salmela-Aro, Academy Professor of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki, Finland, passed away on 26 May 2025, surrounded by her family, with her daughter holding her hand.

Professor Salmela-Aro earned her M.A. in 1989 and her Ph.D. in 1996 in psychology from the University of Helsinki, under the supervision of Professor Jari-Erik Nurmi. Their collaboration on developmental studies of academic achievement continued until Professor Nurmi's passing in 1997. Early in her career, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, after which she joined the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, where she served as a professor until 2018. She then moved to the University of Helsinki, joining the Faculty of Education, and in 2021, she was appointed Academy Professor by the Academy of Finland.

She also held visiting professorships at the Institute of Education, University College London; the School of Education, Michigan State University; the University of California, Irvine; and the Australian Catholic University in Sydney. In addition, she served on the Strategic Funding Council of the Academy of Finland, contributing her expertise to shaping national research priorities.

Professor Salmela-Aro was a prolific and highly influential scholar in developmental and educational psychology. She led several major longitudinal studies funded by the Academy of Finland, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and the European Union. Her research focused on school engagement, school burnout, optimal learning moments, the experience sampling method, and the life-span model of motivation and related interventions. She published over 300 scientific articles and delivered numerous invited keynote lectures around the world.

Perhaps most widely known for her work on school burnout, she developed the School Burnout Inventory- an influential measure, adapted from the occupational literature to capture students' emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inadequacy related to school. Her pioneering research in this area illuminated the links between burnout and outcomes such as depression, disengagement, school dropout, and even long-term career paths, influencing educational interventions and policy across Europe and beyond.

Her impact extended well beyond research. Professor Salmela-Aro was a devoted teacher and mentor, having supervised more than 30 Ph.D. students and postdoctoral researchers. She was instrumental in the creation of the Jacobs Foundation International Postdoctoral Training Program on Pathways through Adolescence and Early Adulthood, hosting postdoctoral fellows and working closely with international partners. Her dedication to supporting early-career scholars was one of her most enduring gifts to the field.

In recognition of her extraordinary contributions, she received numerous accolades, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the European Association for Research on Adolescence and the honorary title of First Class Knight of the Order of the White Rose of Finland, conferred by the President of Finland. She was elected a Fellow of both the Academia Europaea and the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, and held leadership roles in several international scientific organizations. She served as President of the European Association of Developmental Psychology (EADP) and Secretary General of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD), and was the President-Elect of the Division of School Psychology of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP).

For those of us fortunate not only to collaborate with Kata but also to be her friend, her passing is a deeply personal loss. She was an exceptional scholar, but she was also one of the warmest, thoughtful, and supportive people one could ever hope to know. She had a remarkable ability to listen with care, to lead with humility, and to inspire with quiet strength. Her friendship was a source of comfort and clarity, and her encouragement uplifted many of us through life's challenges. She brought light and wisdom into every room she entered, and her absence is felt profoundly.

Kata is survived by her husband, Antti Aro, whom she met in high school; her daughter, Aurora, and sons, Ville and Otso; her grandchildren, Emil and Anna; and her mother and brother.

She will be remembered always for her brilliance, her compassion, and the extraordinary legacy she leaves behind in both science and friendship.

In Memoriam: Professor Peter K. Smith (1943–2025)

Tina Malti[1]

[1]*ISSBD President*

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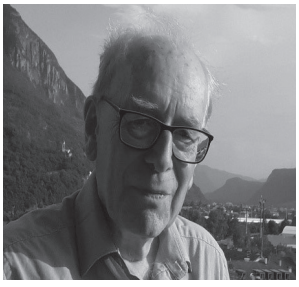

We mourn the loss of Peter Smith, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Professor Smith's research focused on children's social development, particularly bullying and violence in children from an international perspective, as well as strategies for prevention and intervention in school settings. He also examined the role of play in children's social development.

He received several distinctions for his outstanding contributions to developmental psychology, including the William Thierry Preyer award for Excellence in Research on Human Development in 2015, from the European Society for Developmental Psychology. He was also awarded Fellow status by the British Psychological Society, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Academy of Social Sciences.

Professor Smith was a long-time member of the ISSBD and served as chair of the ISSBD Developing Country Fellowship (DCF) Program since 2009. In this role, Peter helped support numerous early-career scholars from the majority world in their professional development. In 2020, he received the honourable status of ISSBD Fellow in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the field of child social development.

We bid farewell to a renowned developmentalist, beloved colleague, and caring person whose positive energy and kind-minded spirit inspired us all. On behalf of the entire ISSBD community, we extend our deepest sympathies to his family and friends.

Peter, we will dearly miss you.