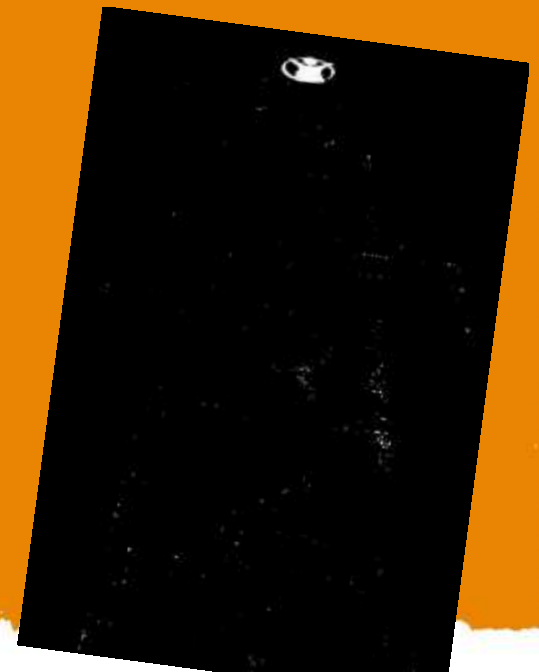


# When 'Early Childhood Development' pathologises HIV-affected parents and their pre-school children: The case for a local and social ecological response

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# Starting point

- Children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn
- Early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential
- Infants born by HIV/AIDS-affected parents are at particular risk of developmental delay
- Many young and HIV-affected children are not given a fair start to life



HIV response needs to pay greater attention to early childhood years – ‘ECD’ and the ‘Essential Package’ a good platform



# Outline

1. Highlight a potential danger of using the ‘early childhood development’ discourse to frame a HIV response for pre-school children
  - i.e., blaming/shaming parents and pathologising children
2. To avoid blaming HIV-affected families for problems whose origins lie outside of their power and control, we need to shift our focus to the contexts that prevent/enable caregivers to facilitate child development
  - i.e., a local and social ecological response

**Disclaimer:** not necessarily the view of Save the Children, not a comprehensive literature review, only a gentle reminder and food for thought to spark discussion.





1.

# POTENTIAL DANGERS OF 'ECD' DISCOURSE

# The rise of an 'ECD' discourse

**Developmental psychology** → inputs, activities, environments, primary caregiver relationships are required for children to develop optimally and timely:

- Jean Piaget – linear and universal framework (hijacked by policy makers) to judge a child's early developmental progress
- Psychoanalysis
- Attachment and learning theory



Jean Piaget, 1896-1980



# ECD and family policy in global North

- ECD frames much family policy
- ECD inherent to expert apparatus → **beware of political undertones**
- In what ways does/might the ECD discourse be used politically in the HIV response in the global South?

## *20<sup>th</sup> century*

- Working class families taught 'rational parental behaviour'
- 'Refrigerator mothers' and autism

## Today

- Preoccupation with absent fathers
- Gay families
- Families with sick or disabled parents (young carers)



# Universalist tendencies of ECD

- Preference for parent-child interaction as practiced by nuclear, heteronormative and privileged families
  - Measures and scales framed by ECD
  - Development NGOs and the UN convention on the rights of the child export family and learning ideals

Families who do not live up to 'our' expectations are subject to scrutiny and intervention



# Towards a norm – blaming and shaming parents

*“Legislation and policies promoting proper childhood always entail the requirement of ‘proper’ parents and ideas of what constitutes a good and proper family”*

Thelen and Haukanes (2010)

## **Murphy et al**

(AIDS Care 2010 and Journal of Child and Family Studies 2011)

- HIV+ mothers (USA) exhibit poorer
  - parenting skills
  - parent-child communication
  - parenting discipline

## **Oswalt and Biasini**

(Journal of Pediatric Health Care 2012)

- HIV+ mothers (USA) associated with
  - Dysfunctional parent-child interactions
  - Difficult child temperament





# Towards a norm – delinquent children

Children of the HIV epidemic have been referred to as “unsocialised, uneducated, in many cases unloved and struggling to adulthood”, predicting a crime-wave as the children grow up.

**Ji et al**  
(Vulnerable children and youth studies 2012)

- Children (China) of HIV+ parents that report lower levels of parental care and lower self-esteem were more likely to report higher levels of delinquent behavior

**Lee et al**  
(Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry 2002)

- Daughters (USA) who perceived their HIV+ mothers to be poor at caring for them were
  - more emotionally distressed and had lower self-esteem
  - Reported more conduct problems

**Sipsma et al**  
(AIDS Care 2013)

- Children (South Africa) of HIV-positive mothers had significantly greater externalizing behaviors than children of HIV-negative mothers



# Summary

- History tells us that ECD is not value free
- There is only a short step from viewing childhoods as 'abnormal' and these children as 'neglected' to pathologising them and blaming/shaming their parents
- A potential danger is the separation of
  - the individual from society, and
  - early childhood development from culture/socio-historical context

The HIV epidemic is having a devastating impact on family life and child development. Variation in child rearing cannot be explained by cultural differences





2.

## LOCAL AND SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL RESPONSE

# The role of 'social' in parenting



**Franz Boas (1858-1942)**

A child's "mental makeup" is affected by "the social and geographical environment"



**Marguerite Mead (1901-1978)**

'Growing Up in New Guinea' (1930)



**Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)**

Cognitive development is embedded in the context of social relationships and practices

Socio-historical variation in childrearing is essential to understand childhood development

We need to "Identify the local child rearing practices that can serve as a basis for further extensions and development, rather than impose concepts and regulations from outside"  
ICDP brochure



# Community-driven response

*“All cultures develop their own mechanisms for survival, development and care of children, and it is those ‘indigenous practices’ which need to be identified and reactivated in order to stimulate the development which is truly authentic and long-lasting. Help is understood in terms of building up competence and supporting the existing child caring-systems within a given community” ICDP.info*

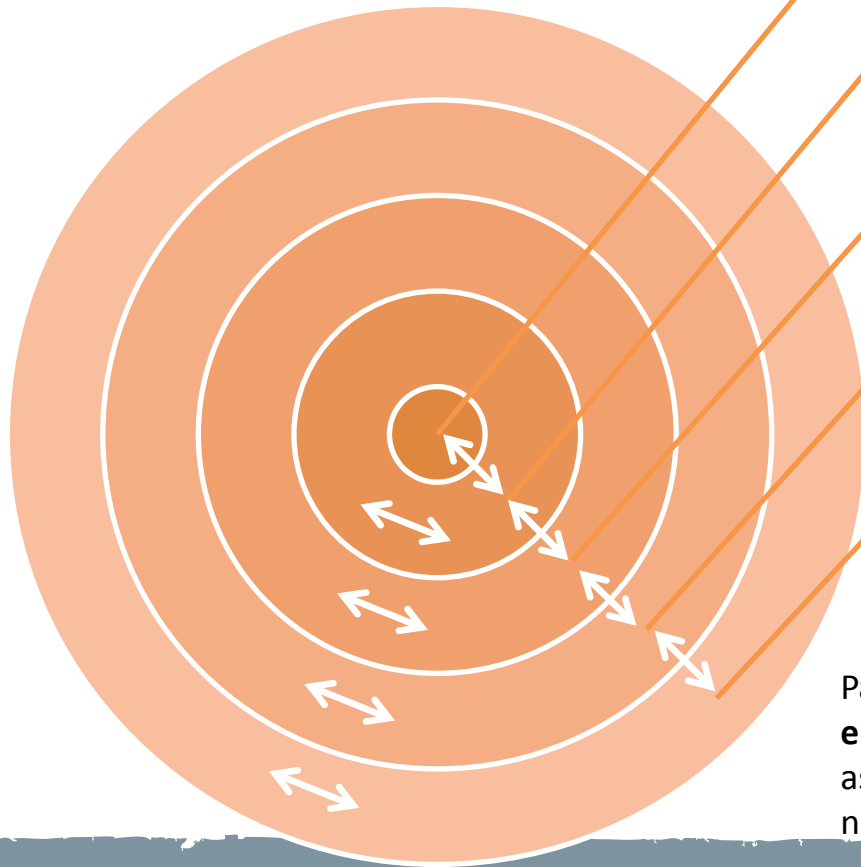


The screenshot shows the ICDP website interface. At the top left is the ICDP logo with the text "International Child Development Programme". To the right are flags of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links: HOME, ABOUT, PROGRAMME, APPROACH, PROJECTS, TRAINING, EVALUATION, DOWNLOAD, CONTACT. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column has a red link "CLICK HERE FOR LATEST NEWS" above a photo of a man and two children. Below the photo is the heading "LATIN AMERICA" and a text block about a pilot project in Colombia. The right column has a red heading "Newsletter" above a photo of a smiling woman. Below the photo is the heading "AFRICA" and a text block about Mozambique. At the bottom right of the main content area is a world map with colored regions.



# Parent-enabling social context

Social ecological theories of child development:  
Interface between 'rings of enablement'



## Child

- Age
- Social competencies

## Household

- Health and education of guardian
- Household composition and assets

## Informal networks

- Neighbours, peers
- Kinship and extended family

## Community structures and networks

- Government and NGO services (e.g., cash transfers, health/HIV services, nutrition prog., child friendly spaces)
- Community groups and home-based carer networks

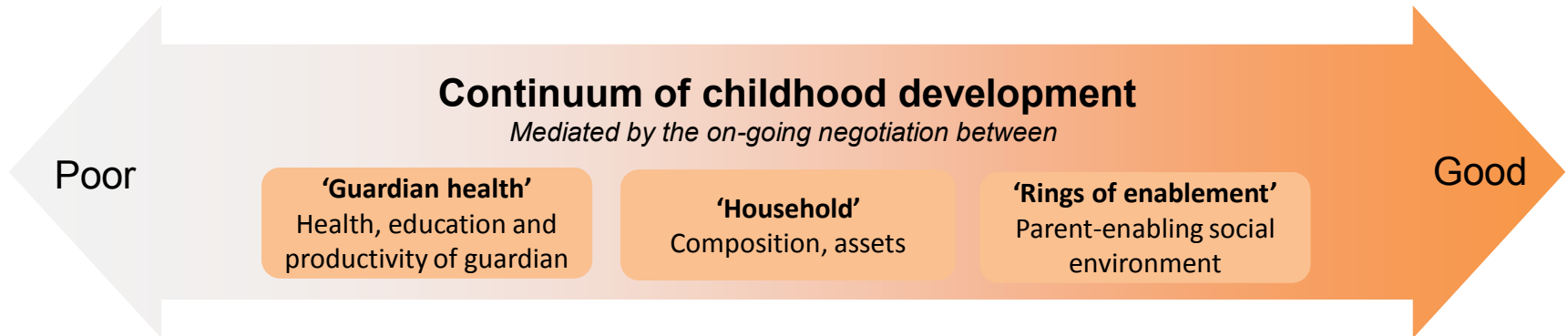
## Societal influences

- Political economy, law, child care policies and culture
- International organisations/NGO engagement

Parent-enabling resources activated by **social psychological enablers**: e.g., local recognition of agency, ethics of care and assistance, social solidarity and networks, social and cultural norms



# Spatial, relational & temporal context



A number of studies have observed a “survival effect”, where older HIV-infected children are no longer different in their neurodevelopment compared with control children, e.g.:

- Bagenda et al (2006) Health, Neurologic, and Cognitive Status of HIV-Infected, Long-Surviving, and Antiretroviral-naive Ugandan Children. *Pediatrics* 117(3):729-740
- Van Rie et al (2008) Impact of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic on the Neurodevelopment of Preschool-Aged Children in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Pediatrics* 122(1):123-128

**We need to understand the pathways of this ‘comeback’ in ECD**



# Conclusion

- We need to be cognizant of...
  - i. the limitations of the 'early childhood development' framework in guiding research/programming → applying a norm
  - ii. how research/programming can implicitly pathologise children and blame/shame parents (and culture) → biopolitical implications
- Research and programming should seek to...
  - i. Understand and strengthen 'rings of enablement', including culturally relevant and community-driven interventions that promote early childhood development





# Implications for the 'Essential Package'

Focus more on...

Building blocks of good childhood development and actions to support caregivers

frameworks 1 & 3

Prescriptions of essential inputs, activities, environments, primary caregiver relationships  
framework 2

Focus less on...

