

CAREGIVERS' EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ON NURTURING CARE AND PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN

A Qualitative Study in a Town in Madagascar

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Background

Early childhood is a crucial phase for Psychomotor Development (PMD) and is strongly influenced by the quality of the caregiving environment. The *Nurturing Care* (NC) Framework promoted by WHO, UNICEF, and other international organizations, identifies health, nutrition, safety, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for early learning as core components of optimal development¹. In low-income settings like Madagascar, poverty, malnutrition, and low literacy levels increase the risk of PMD delays^{3,4}. Understanding caregivers' practices and perceptions is essential for designing effective and culturally appropriate interventions⁵.

Objectives

1. To explore Malagasy caregivers' perceptions of NC and their role in supporting PMD of children aged 0–3 years.
2. To identify caregivers' educational needs related to PMD within their specific socio-economic and cultural context.

Methods

A descriptive qualitative exploratory study in Andavadoaka (south-western Madagascar) using semi-structured interviews was elaborated by two pediatric physiotherapists (PPT) as their PPT Master thesis. Forty caregivers of children aged 0–3 years attending Hopitaly Vezo were interviewed in August 2024 with the support of a cultural mediator providing real-time translation. The interview guide was developed based on the NC Framework¹ and the *Monitoring Child Development Guide*² focusing on daily caregiving practices and educational needs related to PMD. Interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and analyzed through thematic analysis by two independent researchers, with themes discussed and agreed upon.

Results

Caregivers primarily describe PMD in terms of physical growth, health, and survival, consistent with findings from other low-resource settings^{3,4}, while PMD and relationship aspects are acknowledged less explicitly. Several everyday practices potentially supportive of PMD emerged, including physical contact, massage, and spontaneous play, even in peer groups, which have been described as protective factors for early development^{3,5}. However, these practices were not perceived as behaviors that actively promote PMD. Limited awareness of the role of play and motor exploration in early learning was also identified⁵.

Caregivers expressed a strong interest in receiving practical, simple, and easily understandable guidance on how to support movement, play, and child safety within the home environment.

Conclusion

This study highlights caregivers' limited awareness of PMD value of caregiving practices already embedded in daily life, alongside a strong demand for guidance. Key educational needs relate to safety, play, and support for PMD. The findings emphasize the importance of culturally-sensitive educational interventions aligned with the NC Framework^{1,2} and grounded in existing family resources. PPTs trained in resource-limited settings can play a pivotal role in promoting NC and empowering caregivers⁵.

References

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