Neuroscience and parents’ love: the Brazilian experience to fight poverty and promote early childhood development

Muriel Gubert, PhD, Escuela de Nutrición, Universidad de Brasilia, Brasil

Gabriela Buccini, IBCLC, MPH, PhD, Escuela de Salud Pública, Universidad de Yale, EUA
Disclosure:

We have no conflicts to declare
Outline

1. Brazil’s context
2. Early Childhood timeline in Brazil
3. Evidence behind of a ECD program in Brazil
4. Opportunities to promote responsive feeding
5. Future directions for Brazil
Brazil’s context

11% young children (<6y)

207 million people

4 out of 10 children are from families with monthly incomes below the poverty line

Inequalities, poverty, and food insecurity

IBGE, 2017
Timeline of ECD in Brazil

1988
Federal Constitution

2009
Brasileirinhas e Brasileirinhos Saudáveis (health)

2016
Legal Framework for Early Childhood

1990
Child and Adolescent Statute

2012
Brasil Carinhoso (health, education, cash transfer)

2017
Criança Feliz

Child is a subject of rights
Criança Feliz (‘Happy Child’)

Inequalities, poverty, and food insecurity

Target: most vulnerable families – those served by the income transfer program ‘Bolsa Família’.

- Pregnant women receive one visit per month;
- Children from birth to 3 years, one visit per week;
- Children aged 3–6 years, one visit every 15 days.
1. Home visits
   strengthen family skills.

2. Intersectoral initiatives
   strengthen regional policies
Program organization

- National level
- State level
- Municipal level
What is the evidence behind Criança Feliz program?

Neuroscience & parents’ love
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the first 1,000 days

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to violence
- Family Dysfunction

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Poor school performance
- Developmental delays
- Juvenile justice involvement
- Poor health in adulthood

“ Toxic Stress”

Reference: Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc.
ACEs & Role of Stress

• Some stress is normal and necessary for child development
• There is no such thing as absence of stress. Broadly categorized into 3 types based on the perception and reaction:

**Positive Stress**
- Brief increase in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels

**Tolerable Stress**
- Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships

**Toxic Stress**
- Prolonged activation of stress responses system in the absence of protective relationships
Criança Feliz: Neuroscience and parents’ love

- Reduce sources of stress
- Enhancing parental resilience
- Providing an array of social connections
- Providing parents concrete resources in times of need
- Facilitating knowledge of parenting & child development
- Supporting healthy social & emotional development in young children
- Strengthen core life skills
- Support responsive relationships

Strengthening Families Approach

Children
Healthy Development & Educational Achievement

Adults
Responsive Caregiving & Economic Stability
Building a comprehensive ECD system to reach the most vulnerable

Quality and timing of early environments shape a child’s future potential

Reference: Lancet Series presentation
Building a comprehensive ECD system to reach the most vulnerable
Building a comprehensive ECD system to reach the most vulnerable

What is missing?
Opportunities to enhance a comprehensive ECD system by integrating nutrition components

Intersectoral ECD component

Nutrition, food security, responsive feeding component

BFHI
Opportunities to enhance a comprehensive ECD system by integrating responsive feeding

Crianca Feliz nurturing care

Responsive Feeding

Breastfeeding & Healthy complementary feeding
Building a comprehensive ECD system to reach the most vulnerable by integrating responsive feeding
Future directions & research

• Degree of ECD policies implementation at the municipal level
• In-depth interview with program managers
• Implementation science system modeling to build a comprehensive ECD system in Brazil (process evaluation)
• Impact evaluation (Victora et al.)

Limitations

• Overlapping of services within the existent programs
• Challenging in coordinating the care (e.g. who is responsible for what)
• Monitoring and evaluation system
• Sustainability of programs when changing government
If we change the beginning of the story, we change the whole story

(Raffi Cavoukian - the Beginning of the life)

Thank you!
Gracias!
Obrigada!

gabriela.buccini@yale.edu