



Measuring Prevalence of Child Development Delays Through National Household Surveys in Chile, Honduras, and Nicaragua

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Rationale

There is significant evidence correlating vulnerabilities in early child development and later poor health and educational functioning, alcoholism, unemployment, criminal behavior, and mental health problems. The strong evidence coming from developed countries contrast with the limited data available in Latin American and Caribbean countries. From a public health perspective, the first priority is to understand the magnitude and distribution of developmental delays among children living in developing countries. This information is critical to identify needed early intervention policies, estimate costs for social, educational and health promotion and prevention programs, and ensure that the most disadvantaged children and families receive these interventions.

Traditionally, the evaluation of developmental capacities in children has involved direct observation by experts resulting in important costs, which may explain the existing data gap at a population level. To overcome this constraint, the Inter American Development Bank (IDB), with funding from the Canadian Technical Assistance Program (CANTAP-3), is implementing a Technical Cooperation project that supports the Governments of Honduras, Nicaragua and Chile in the design, pilot testing, validation, and analysis of questions on child development, attached to population health surveys in each country. This effort is aimed at developing a less expensive way of measuring the prevalence of development delays in children, including understanding its distribution by place of residence, maternal education and occupation, household income, and other relevant variables.

Progress to date

The Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Statistics in each country agreed to introduce a selected number of child development questions in their respective nationally representative household surveys. The Child development modules of Chile and Nicaragua contain also questions to identify the places where children usually receive day care, identify parents' preferences about day care services, and determine the prevalence of some chronic diseases in children. The initiative has brought together different government institutions (e.g. Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of the Family) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in child development initiatives in each country. They have worked together to select questions for the child development modules specifically tailored to the needs and culture of each country. They have also participated of local workshops planning how to analyze the household survey results.

	Chile	Nicaragua	Honduras
Type of Household Survey	Quality of Life and Health Survey	Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)	Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)
Sample	6,300 households	14,000 households	21,000 households
Child Development Module	2-72 months	7-59 months	9-35 months
Data collection	April 2006	August-December 2006	November 2005-April 2006

The process of negotiating the introduction of a child development module into national household surveys, as well as piloting and validating the questions is providing significant lessons to improve similar efforts in future initiatives in other developing countries. Household surveys provide a unique opportunity to reach vulnerable infant and young children, living in poverty and isolated geographical areas, whose development might becoming compromised due to lack of early educational, health, and nurturing opportunities.