

Parenting the Future:

A Study of the Effectiveness, Scalability, and Sustainability of Early Childhood Development Services



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Background

In rural China, there is a high prevalence of **developmental delays** in children aged 0-3.



Early childhood development (ECD) has been linked to adult human capital outcomes: IQ, educational attainment, employment/earnings, and mental health

With limited support and resources, caregivers struggle to provide the stimulation these children need to thrive.

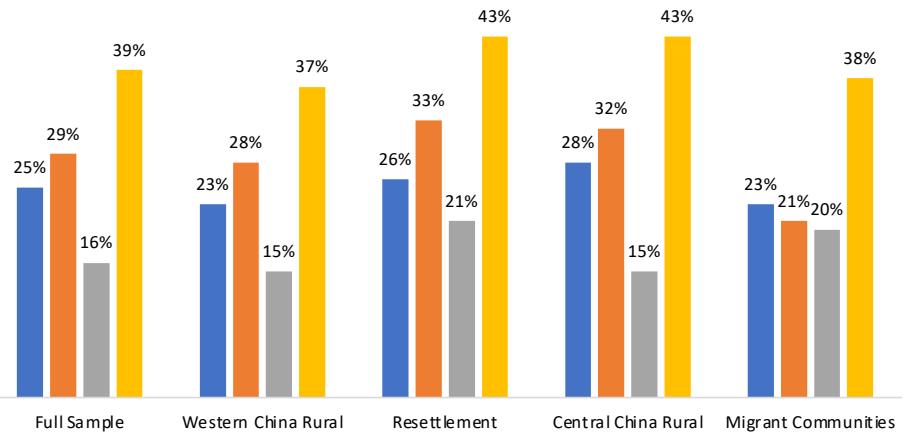
The issue of developmental delays is compounded by a **high prevalence of caregiver mental health problems** in rural China.

Caregiver depressive symptoms are negatively associated with ECD and interactive parenting.

Caregivers with depressive symptoms gain no improvement in their children's development from ECD interventions.

Prevalence of Caregiver Mental Health Problems across Different Rural Communities

■ Depressive symptoms ■ Anxiety symptoms ■ Stress symptoms ■ Any symptoms



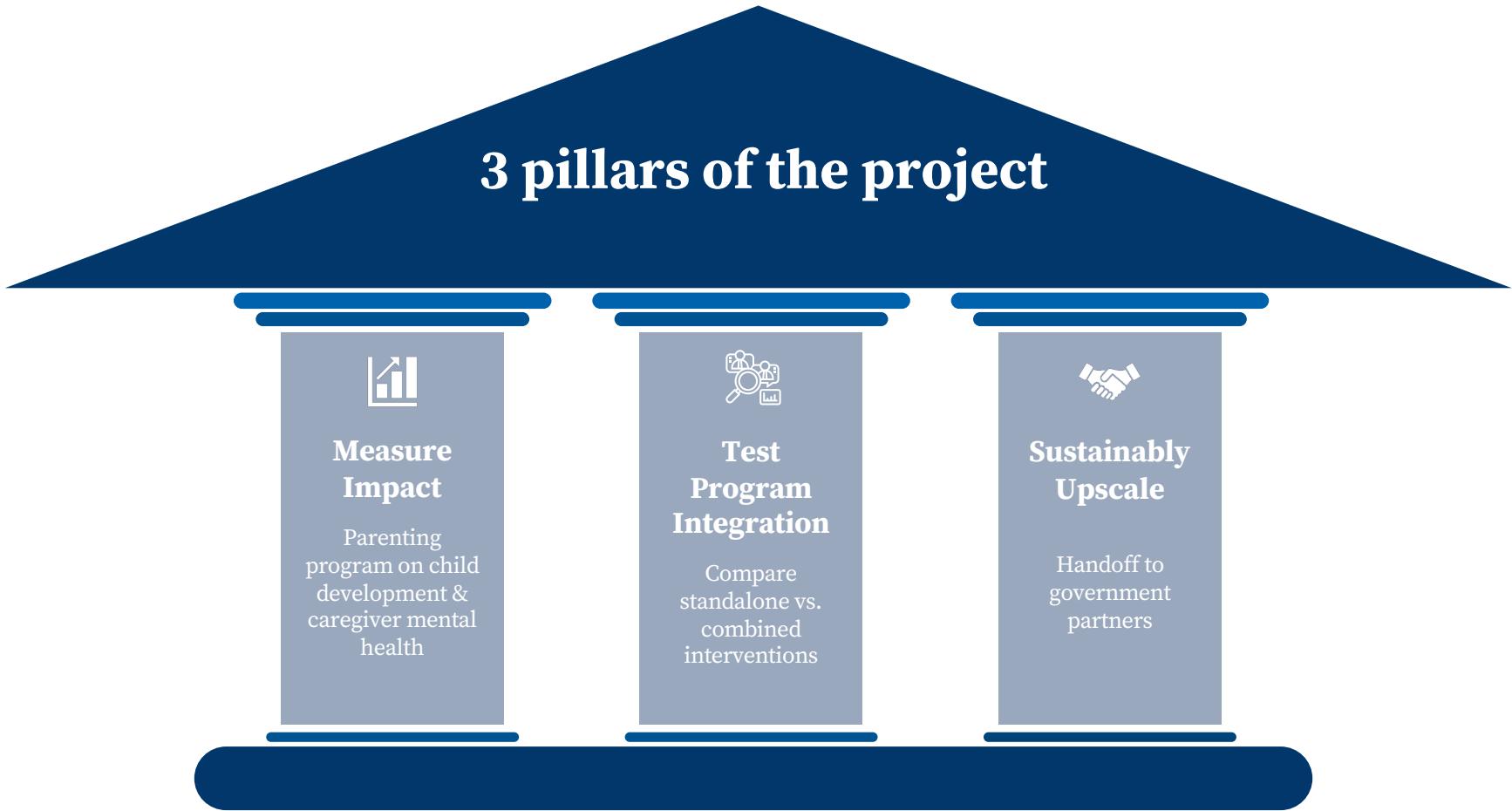
The Approach

To combat these issues, we...

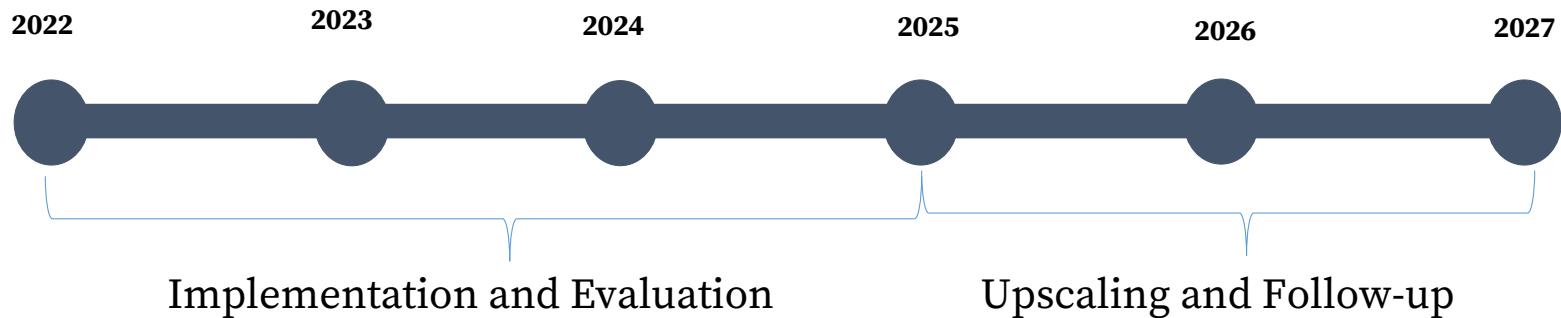
- designed, implemented, and evaluated **effective ECD and caregiver mental health services**
- collaborated with local, (regional, and national) **government agencies**



3 pillars of the project



Project Timeline





Update

Phase 1: Implementation and Evaluation

Years 1-2: Implementation

Treatment Arm 1 (25 villages, 250 child-caregiver dyads)	Control Arm (45 villages, 450 child-caregiver dyads)
Treatment Arm 2 (25 villages, 250 child-caregiver dyads)	Treatment Arm 3 (25 villages, 250 child-caregiver dyads)

- **Treatment Arm 1:** Parenting Training
- **Treatment Arm 2:** Caregiver Mental Health Support
- **Treatment Arm 3:** Parenting Training + Caregiver Mental Health Support

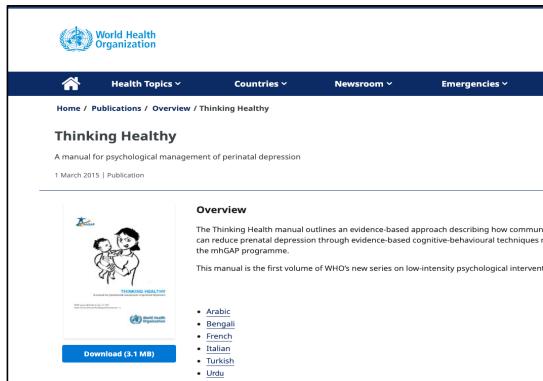
Parenting Curriculum

- Loosely adapted from **Reach up and Learn**
- Age-appropriate interactive activities
- Four domains: cognitive, language, motor, social emotion
- Implemented in a few trials and found to be effective on child cognitive development
- Hybrid format: parenting centers & home visit



Caregiver Mental health Support Curriculum

One of the first caregiver mental health interventions in rural China

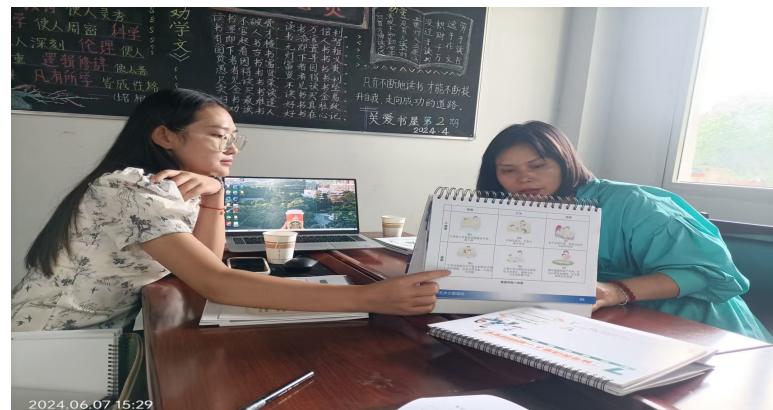


Rural China Context

Curriculum Development – Caregiver Mental Health Support



At a Glance: Training for Village Trainers



At a Glance: Parenting Sessions



At a Glance: Caregiver Mental Health Support Sessions



Project Status: April 2025

- **Endline survey : Completed ✓**
- **Preliminary Findings Include:**
 - Parenting Training improved cognition, language and prosocial tendency
 - Parenting Training + Caregiver Mental Health Support shows signs of synergistic effects and helps with depressive symptom

Project Achievements and Program Impact

1. High caregiver attendance and engagement

2. Improved sense of peer support and immediate emotional relief

3. Strong facilitator adoption and program feasibility



1. High caregiver attendance and engagement



1. One-on-one parenting
training sessions
monthly attendance rate:
67% 

2. Mental health support
sessions monthly
attendance rate: 76% 

3. Service encounters
delivered per month:
2,919 

2. Improved sense of peer support and immediate emotional relief



Caregivers reported feeling supported by peers and experiencing immediate emotional relief after the sessions.

“I mentioned my baby cries at night and won’t sleep, and the other moms said theirs do too. That made me feel it’s not just me doing badly—like I’ve got company.”

---- Mother A



“Sometimes taking care of the baby gets really frustrating. Talking about it feels like setting down a heavy rock inside. Everyone nodded—they get it. I felt a lot lighter.”

---- Mother B

3. Strong facilitator adoption and program feasibility

Facilitators found the interventions (especially for the parenting sessions) engaging and easy to deliver, indicating the program's potential for broader implementation.



“There’s basically no difficulty—as long as I notify people to come, I can start the class easily.”

---- A parenting training facilitator

“I mark the next session in my health calendar, go over the lesson a couple days before, and get the cards ready. As long as the parents show up, it’s easy to lead—nothing too difficult.”

---- A caregiver mental health support facilitator



Update

Phase 2: Upscaling & Follow-up

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Years 3-5: Upscaling

✓ **Phase 1: Foundation Building (Completed)**

- Began during implementation, now expanding and refining
- 100 local officials trained
- All human resources come entirely from the local government
- Local government has dedicated funding to sustain this project
- We will continue providing training and technical assistance

→ **Phase 2: Sustainable Transition (Current & Future)**

- Local government gradually assuming operational control
- Research team transitioning to complete advisory/mentorship role
- On track for full institutionalization into provincial ECD policy by Year 5



Future Upscaling Plans

Strengthen Stability

- Optimize operations at all existing Child Centers
- Develop a response system to support parenting trainers

Create Upscaling Toolkit

- Continue mentorship of local government partners
- Provide and refine training, materials, and protocols
- Expand relations to regional and national levels

Measure & Amplify Impact

- Conduct follow-up surveys to measure long-term impact
- Submit academic publications and reports to journals to drive national adoption
- Present findings at international conferences to increase awareness



Future Evaluation Plans

- We plan to first conduct qualitative interviews with families in May 2025. This will help us contextualize the results of our analyses.
- Following the interviews, we will make plans to track the benefited families to see how sustainable the effects are.

Beyond the Project

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Local Impact: Knowledge Exchanges

Our project has become a learning hub, hosting researchers and institutions seeking scalable ECD solutions.

We hosted 61 visits from province, city, and county-level governments, research institutions, NGOs, foundations, and international leading experts and scholars.

Global Reach: Conferences and Presentations

Our team has presented the Project's insights at key conferences worldwide, engaging policymakers and practitioners in discussions on scalable ECD solutions.

In addition, the study of the project was presented and will be presented in renown conferences in China and internationally.



Thrive scientific conference:
Scaling early childhood development
programmes and policies in low- and
middle-income countries

London, England
24-25 June 2025



Strengthening the ECD Ecosystem

Our team has hosted and attended workshops to engage stakeholders in ECD and enable knowledge sharing with other research team, NGO, and government





Giving Back

Our commitment extends beyond data collection. Through volunteer initiatives, student engagement, and community partnerships, we ensure our work leaves lasting value at every level.

Stanford University

Pilot Centers Volunteers

In 2023, we had university students from our partner universities visit Pilot Centers, where they worked with the families who rarely visit the center. These volunteers attended to those children and taught parents the stimulating parenting practices taught through our program.

In addition to the parental training support provided, these volunteers also served as a safe, designated expert who could provide additional information and support to the Child Center participants.



Promoting Responsive Caregiving and Mental Health Awareness Beyond Participants

Through online and offline events, we built a network of organizations that pooled resources and experience to work together to promote responsive caregiving and mental health awareness in China and improve the lives of rural caregivers.



A responsive caring lecture at a Chengdu remote community



Workshop to promote mental health awareness among community mothers and grandmothers

Volunteer Campaign



From May to October 2024, we launched a six-month volunteering campaign involving 40 volunteers.

During the first two months, volunteers received training, in which they learned how to conduct one-on-one parenting sessions.

From July to October, these trained volunteers began delivering services at village centers, playing an active role in supporting early childhood development through direct engagement with families

Thank you!

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