

Developing a Guidance Program to Raise Medical Personnel's' Awareness to the Importance of Early Childhood Intervention for Children With Special Needs in Zimbabwe

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Introduction:

- ❖ Early Diagnosis and intervention is critical for the development of children with special needs..
- ❖ In Zimbabwe, because of cultural beliefs that developmental disorders are caused by witch craft and angry ancestors, there is a delay in bringing children to medical attention (Asuni, 1990; Levers & Mark, 1995).
- ❖ Health Care Professionals (HCPs) in Zimbabwe lack training about identifying and treating developmental disorders as well as supporting parents of children with special needs .
- ❖ Therefore, training of HCPs about these subjects is vital for the education of the caregivers as well as the management of these disorders.

Goals

To strengthen HCPs' knowledge and skills to promote early identification of children's disorders, diagnosis and intervention.

To educate HCPs on supporting parents of children with developmental disorders.

Participants

38 participants which compose the multidisciplinary teams of HCPs from five local clinics:

- five medical doctors,
- twenty state registered nurses,
- two occupational therapists,
- one physiotherapist,
- two Social workers,
- four pediatricians
- four psychologists.



Procedure

The training will take place in the department of psychiatry at Parirenyatwa hospital once a week for four weeks. The Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, administration of Parirenyatwa hospital and the Local Authorities will be met before the program starts.

The Training Protocol- Main Topics:

- ❖ **Normative Development:** including socio-emotional aspects.
- ❖ **Developmental Disorders:** enhancing HCPs' identification of common disorders, provision of appropriate education and support to parents of children with these disorders and encouraging them to receive professional treatment.
- ❖ **Parents and HCPs communication:** HCPs will be trained on how to establish a therapeutic relationship and to exhibit empathic supportive behavior towards families and creating a facilitating environment for parents.
- ❖ **Resolution of the Diagnosis:** The HCPs will be trained to be aware on what parents go through after receiving their child's diagnosis and supporting a process of coming to terms with their child's diagnosis (Oppenheim et al. 2007).

❖ Assessment:

The HCPs will be assessed before and after the training to see the level of their knowledge regarding the main training topics and assess the training's effectiveness.

Challenges

Despite the important benefits of this training program, the traditional beliefs still prevalent in the country, the poverty in the community, stigmatization and the stressors which parents face, women in particular, may have implications on the expected results.

Take Home Message

Raising HCPs' awareness of developmental disorders and socio-emotional needs of children is vital for improving the development of children with special needs in Zimbabwe. Poverty alleviation supported by the benefits of early childhood interventions is of pivotal importance.