

What We're Learning:

Upcoming Research on Supporting Early Childhood Development in Crisis Contexts



Ahlan Simsim (“Welcome Sesame” in Arabic) is a partnership between Sesame Workshop and the IRC to deliver early learning and nurturing care to children and caregivers affected by displacement and crisis in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. NYU Global TIES for Children is partnering with this project as an independent evaluator. Through a brand-new, local version of *Sesame Street* and in-person direct services across the region, Ahlan Simsim reaches displaced and host community families wherever they are—from TV and mobile devices to classrooms and health clinics—with the vital educational resources that they need in order to thrive. Fueled by a groundbreaking grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and additional support from the LEGO Foundation, Ahlan Simsim is also elevating awareness, engaging policymakers, spearheading research, and increasing investment in early childhood development in crisis settings.



Sesame Workshop, BRAC, the IRC, and independent evaluator NYU Global TIES for Children are partnering to bring playful learning opportunities to children and families affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises, while designing and testing program approaches and educational content that can be adapted and scaled across multiple contexts. We are engaging directly with communities affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises to understand the needs of families and meet those needs through a combination of educational media and direct services. Additionally, as we design and test new program approaches and content, we are generating evidence on how to promote play-based learning and mental wellbeing for children affected by crises globally. And through strategic advocacy, we are sharing what we learn with key local, national, and global decisionmakers to increase prioritization and investment in early childhood interventions in crises around the world. Play to Learn is funded by a generous donation from the LEGO Foundation.

Ahlan Simsim and Play to Learn are trailblazing programs from Sesame Workshop, BRAC, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with generous support from the MacArthur Foundation and the LEGO Foundation. Together, these programs are providing children affected by crisis with opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

The importance of early childhood development (ECD) is well established. However, there has been little research about what sorts of early childhood interventions work best in crisis and conflict settings. Together with independent evaluator NYU Global TIES for Children, we are doubling the global evidence base on ECD in crisis contexts by generating research and testing new program models to document what can and what does not achieve impact for children and their caregivers, emphasizing play-based approaches. We are also conducting longitudinal research to better understand children’s growth and development during periods of displacement and implementation research to support content creation and ECD service provision.

Collectively, this body of research will help us understand how best to support the whole family with ECD programs that can be delivered in different ways to children and caregivers affected by crisis.

We expect this research will inform the most impactful ways ECD can be included as a key cross-cutting priority in the humanitarian architecture and will support governments, implementers, and funders in making choices about design and delivery of ECD programs in crisis contexts around the world.

What we hope to learn



LEARNING ABOUT MEDIA-BASED INTERVENTIONS:

Q: Can early learning videos help children develop new skills?

Do some children benefit from the videos more than others, and why?

What is the cost-effectiveness of our program?

► EVALUATION OF OUR *WATCH, PLAY, LEARN* VIDEOS IN COLOMBIA

This evaluation will help us understand the impacts of watching our *Watch, Play, Learn* early learning video segments at home on the math and socio-emotional skills 4-year-olds in Colombia who have been affected by displacement.

Q: What technology solutions can help us best serve hard-to-reach children and their families affected by crisis?

How feasible is it to reach these families with educational media, and what does it cost to do that?

► IMPLEMENTATION PILOT LEARNINGS FROM *WATCH, PLAY, LEARN* IN COLOMBIA, KENYA, AND BANGLADESH

In addition to measuring the impact of our *Watch, Play, Learn* videos in Colombia, we are conducting pilot programs to learn more about their use in Colombia, Kenya, and Bangladesh. Together, these three pilots will help us generate learnings to inform future program design and implementation.

Q: Can watching a TV show designed to teach social-emotional learning effectively develop these skills in children?

► EVALUATION OF BEST OF *AHLAN SIMSIM* TV SHOW IN JORDAN:

This evaluation will help us understand how watching the television show *Ahlan Simsim* supports children's social-emotional skills. This study could provide solid evidence that it's possible to reach and teach young children in crisis contexts through video content cost-effectively and at scale.

Anticipated dissemination timeline

Evaluation of phone-based Reach Up and Learn program in Jordan

Evaluation of best of Ahlan Simsim TV show in Jordan

Evaluation of remote early learning + Caregiver Support program in Lebanon

Implementation pilot learnings from *Watch, Play, Learn* in Colombia, Kenya, and Bangladesh

2022

2023



LEARNING ABOUT CENTER-BASED AND HOME-BASED INTERVENTIONS:

Q: How will focusing on fathers in addition to mothers during in-home caregiver support visits increase fathers' engagement in and understanding of caregiving? How will this increased engagement of fathers affect their children?

► EVALUATION OF BRAC'S HOME-BASED HUMANITARIAN PLAY LAB MODEL WITH FATHER ENGAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH

This evaluation will help us understand the additional benefits of engaging not only Rohingya mothers but also fathers through a home visit program supporting caregivers of children ages 0 to 6 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. And what is the cost-effectiveness of the program.

Q: How can well-child visits be designed to maximize caregiver engagement in their child's development throughout their first year?

► RESEARCH TO IMPROVE IMPLEMENTATION OF WELL-CHILD VISITS TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH NURSES AND MIDWIVES IN JORDAN

We're hoping that this approach will give us another tool to strengthen parents' engagement in their children's healthy development. This study will help us understand caregivers' knowledge of existing health services available for their children in Jordan. It will also help us understand how well-child visits can be used to encourage caregiver engagement in their child's learning and development.



LEARNING ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF CRISIS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT:

Q: What are cultural factors (community, household, and individual) leading to risk and resilience for the Rohingya community? How can learning through play be fostered? How are adolescent mothers and mothers-to-be best supported to ensure healthy development of both mother and child?

► LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY IN COX'S BAZAR:

This research will launch during Play to Learn and aims to continue for the next 6 to 7 years, after Play to Learn has concluded. The study will eventually help us to understand what quality early learning through play looks like in the Rohingya community. More broadly, the study will help us better understand how humanitarian emergencies affect very young children—an important and under-researched topic. We want this study to be a catalyst that encourages more research on and attention to how young children can grow and thrive in a wide range of contexts.

First round of findings from longitudinal study of the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar

Research to improve implementation of well-child visits to Ministry of Health nurses and midwives in Jordan

Evaluation of our Watch, Play, Learn videos in Colombia

Evaluation of BRAC's home-based Humanitarian Play Lab model with father engagement in Bangladesh



LEARNING ABOUT REMOTE SERVICES:

Q: Can six months of a remote caregiving program change caregiver behaviors and improve their mental health and wellbeing?

► EVALUATION OF PHONE-BASED REACH UP AND LEARN PROGRAM IN JORDAN:

This evaluation will help us understand how a phone-based early childhood development program can support caregivers' parenting skills and wellbeing. This research will help us refine another essential tool for reaching families even when we can't see them in person.

Q: How does an early learning program support a child's holistic development, and how are those outcomes complemented by additional parental support?

► EVALUATION OF REMOTE EARLY LEARNING + CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM IN LEBANON:

This evaluation will help us understand how a remote early learning program and a remote caregiver support program affect child development, which will help us adjust remote learning to make it as effective as possible in future crises.

Learn more

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE CONTACT:

Kim Foulds
Vice President, Content Research and Evaluation
Kim.Foulds@sesame.org
www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/crisis-response/research

