

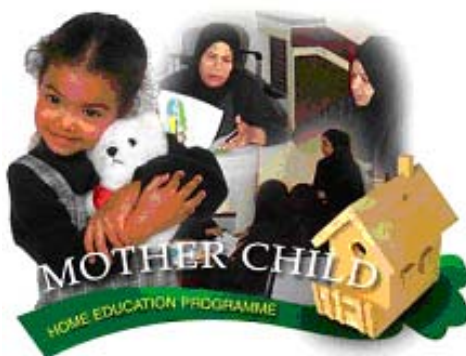
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The Mother Child Home Education Programme, MOCEP Kingdom of Bahrain

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Introduction

Different countries employ different policies and strategies for addressing families living in poverty. * The US reports the highest relative rate of poverty among industrialised nations (32.9 million; 11.7%) and the rates are rising, particularly for American children (up from 13.2% in 2001 to 14.7% in 2002) (Aber, 2002; Danziger & Haveman, 2001). The increase of more costly *atomised* families with single heads of households, coupled with a high percentage of low-quality childcare provision (60% reported by the largest childcare study to date, NICHD, 2001) account for only part of the problem. The experts tell us that the influx of uneducated and poor immigrants, along with income inequality, inadequate affordable health care, insufficient elderly and disabled income support, and earning supplements that fall too short below the poverty thresholds, are to blame. Other countries with similarly high rates of women in the work force (i.e., Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway and France) have low poverty rates due to their more generous social policies (Luxembourg Income Study, 2000). Single and working mothers who opt to stay at home are provided with government subsidies for maternal and paternity leave. High quality childcare for children under six has long been a staple for these countries (Ball, 1994).

In the Arab world (those countries listed in the Middle East and North Africa, MENA) poverty statistics are incomplete and often not reported, especially in non-democratic countries. Empirical evidence indicates that, regionally, there are more people living in poverty, more illiterate adults, and more undernourished persons today than in the 1980's. Some research figures put the estimates of people living in absolute poverty at **118 million** in the Middle East, including the adjustment numbers from the salvages of war, famine, natural disasters and failed policy (Al Ghonemy, 1998). The greatest increases are with women and children, which typifies the global poverty trend. Much can and is being done about the problems of poverty in Bahrain, but in a newly formed democracy, it is a long and difficult task to establish a political and economic infrastructure for eliminating poverty. Poverty in Bahrain is not entirely equated with the World Bank's international \$1–2 a-day poverty level because it is considered one of the oil-producing countries in the Middle East. But it is not an affluent, poverty-free Middle Eastern country. According to one Arab scholar, persistent poverty is widespread in Bahrain with over 33% in 1984 and **24%** in 1986 living in absolute poverty (Al Ghonemy, 1998).

Aggressive employment campaigns, along with indirect and direct revenue taxes placed Bahrain at the top of the Human Development Index (HDI) report by the UNDP in 1997 (Islam, 2002). Yet, as in other Middle Eastern countries, index ratios do not always take into account the quality of the social safety net measures in place, or the disposable incomes of the poor in real terms. The crux of the problem lies with *social imbalance*, a process that creates and “perpetuates poverty and inequality of opportunities for social progress” (Al-Ghonemy, 1998). Recent research suggests that countries that want to reduce poverty must make institutional and structural changes that will, in turn, “reallocate resources to enhance human capital while at the same time provide safety social nets” (Islam, 2002). For this study, the single most important dimension of inequality of educational opportunity was revealed in the enrolments of private nurseries and kindergartens (3-6 years old). Tuitions required for attendance at these schools are, of course, out of reach to poor parents, while the quality of education is far superior to that of national pre-school provision (Hadeed & Sylva, 1999). Furthermore, the evidence is clear that when quality of childcare is low, the effects are adversely related to child outcome measures and future performance and, in most cases, the child is better off staying at home (Hadeed & Sylva, 1999). We know from a growing body of research evidence that public and community high-quality early child-care provision for children under six, including home intervention programmes, have long-term positive benefits for children, parents, families.

The Mother Child Home Education Programme, MOCEP

MOCEP was first launched in the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2001 after several years of preparation. It is a home intervention programme originally from Turkey (Kagitcibasi, 1996) that was adapted and sensitised to the local Arab population and culture in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The MOCEP programme was initially launched and implemented under the auspices of the Bahraini Society for Child Development, BSCD and a previous description about the programme is available in the 2001 publication of the society's *Child Development Journal*

(Hadeed, 2001). The MOCEP programme in Bahrain is currently under the auspices of the Bahrain Red Crescent Society, BRCS (www.mocep-bahrain.org).

MOCEP is a high quality, intensive, home intervention programme that targets poor families in Bahrain living in persistent poverty. The programme consists of two complimentary components: A ***Mother Support Programme, MSP***, (see photo insert) which provides a series of child-rearing topics that are educational for promoting quality home child-care for preschool children in the developing years;



Weekly Discussions for Mothers

and, ***The Cognitive Training Programme, CTP***, which provides preschool children before they go to Primary school with the skills and abilities they will need to compete successfully (see photo insert).



Reading Materials to Supplement Weekly Lessons

Combined, the two components of the MOCEP programme provide a comprehensive, two-generational approach to empowering mothers and their preschool children with the skills, knowledge and abilities they need to improve their lives, where it matters most—in the home with life-long learning relationships.

The results from the rigorous research evaluation of the MOCEP programme implementation in Bahrain were analysed in an in-depth experimental

study and evaluation that was carried out from 2001 – 2004. The data analysis and results were written while the author, Dr. Hadeed, was on sabbatical as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University and the complete results will be published in late 2004 in the book, *Poverty Begins at Home, The Mother Child Home Education Programme, MOCEP-Bahrain*, by Peter Lang Publishing, USA. Complete analysis, data, charts and results are available in the book.

Impact research results from MOCEP intervention

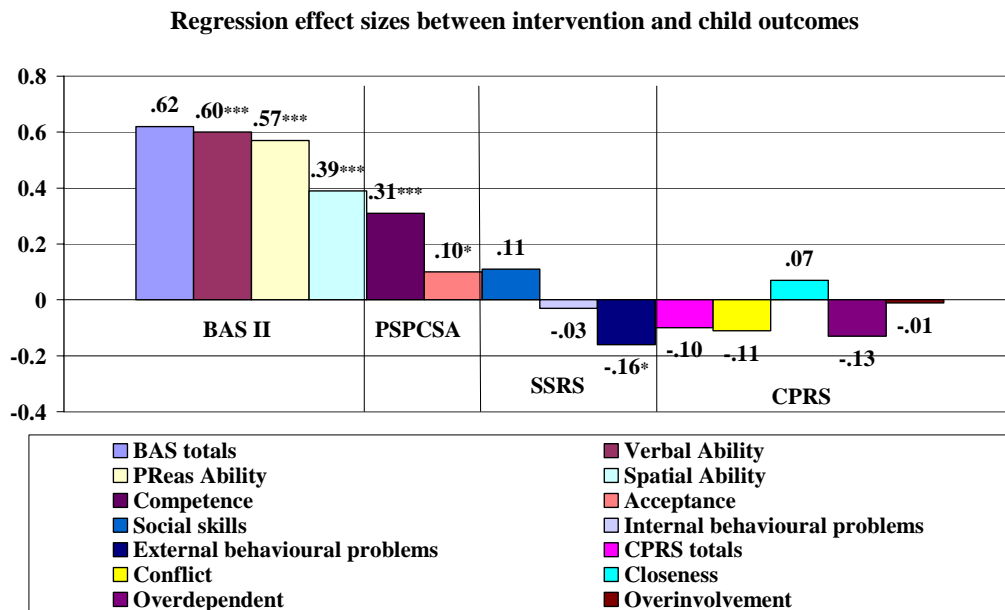
The effects of the MOCEP programme on children's development and family relations were measured using several psychometric instruments on a randomised sample from a cohort of children born in 1996. Ninety-two families were recruited to the intervention and 75 families served as a control group for comparison for the research investigation. All families were socially and economically disadvantaged and child participants were approaching primary school age and not attending any form of pre-school provision.

A series of multiple regression analysis, coupled with an effect-size analysis (McCartney & Rosenthal, 2000; McCartney & Dearing, 2002), were used to measure the effects of the MOCEP programme on several aspects of children's development (cognitive, social and emotional competencies) and parental attitudes and beliefs regarding child-rearing and development. The quality of home environments was also investigated.

All children, families and home environments were pre-tested before the intervention (2001) and then post-tested at the end of the intervention (2002). All tests were pilot-tested, tested for reliability, and validated before their application. The data collection was carried out in Arabic by trained staff. The results on the child developmental outcome measure were impressive.

- **Cognitive (IQ) abilities:** The intervention children significantly outperformed the children in the control group, **four to one**, on verbal, reasoning and spatial ability measures.
- **Children's self-concept (self-esteem) measures:** Children who received the MOCEP intervention had *significantly higher scores* than the children in the control group on self-concept competency and acceptance measures. In other words they perceived themselves to be more competent, cognitively and socially, than the children who did not receive the programme.
- **Social skills and the incidence of behaviour problems:** As a result of the MOCEP intervention, the children had fewer *external* behavioural problems when compared with the children in the control group. Children who received the programme were significantly less aggressive and disruptive.
- **Quality of the mother-child relationship:** We wanted to know how independent, dependent, co-operative or conflictive relationships were at home for both, the mother and child. The children in the programme showed less over-dependency and conflict as a result of the intervention when compared to families that did not receive intervention.

The chart below illustrates the effect sizes of the intervention on the aspects of development assessed (child outcomes).



The second half of the rigorous experimental analysis took a close look at the impact of the MOCEP programme on the parent, family and home influences on child development. In other words, we wanted to know *how and to what degree* were parent child-rearing beliefs and child-disciplining strategies having an effect on the children's development in their homes. We also wanted to know how educational and learner-friendly the home environments were for the children in the intervention programme compared with children without the intervention. This way we could look at the improvement from the programme in the immediate home environment to see if it had produced significant changes that would support early years development in the homes.

Again, the results from the intervention of the parent measures showed very impressive results on families and their home environments.

- Parenting strategies (harsh, firm and lax):** MOCEP intervention actually **predicts** (a significant, causal relationship) a *reduction* in ***lax*** (permissive) parenting strategies. In other words, mothers were more attentive and educated to make better choices regarding child-rearing strategies with their children. The research also revealed that ***harsh*** (authoritarian) parenting was associated with lower cognitive abilities and ***firm*** (authoritative) parenting was associated with higher social skill scores.
- Parenting beliefs and practices on child-rearing (progressive and traditional):** These results are directly linked with how well children perform at home and at school. For this investigation, the parental beliefs and practices were measured and tracked before and after the intervention to note

any significant changes made by the MOCEP intervention's effects. The results showed that *progressive parenting beliefs* (beliefs that describe children as active learners and parents are facilitators for learning) were correlated with higher cognitive/social abilities and fewer behavioural problems, whereas *traditional parenting beliefs* (beliefs are described by unrealistic goals and expectations for children; adult-centred) reinforced less social competency and over-dependent parent-child relationships.

- **The quality of the home environment:** We were looking to measure any significant changes (improvements) in the quality of the home environments (relationships, educational materials, interaction, disciplining approaches, language, etc) as a result of the programme intervention. Not surprisingly, the intervention families provided significantly **more stimulation for learning (materials, games, books, outings, etc); warmer, more affectionate relationships; and less physical punishment at home when compared with the homes in the control group.**

The summary of the research findings present clear evidence that the MOCEP programme works effectively to raise child developmental skills and abilities before entry into primary school and it, furthermore, promotes positive changes in parenting skills and home environments for early learning.

In the Appendix, Figure 12 (abstracted from the book, *Poverty Begins at Home*) illustrates the direct links (path analysis) between the MOCEP intervention programme and the effects on child outcomes and parental-home interrelationships.

Summary

With future democratic changes taking root in Bahrain, it is time to address this inequality in pre-school childcare by proposing new initiatives for comprehensive, public high quality pre-school provision for all children under six. The MOCEP programme in Bahrain is not unlike centre-based quality childcare pre-school provision. The goals are similar in terms of raising the quality of life for the disadvantaged where it matters the most – in the home – with education and skills for the mothers, and for the children before they begin primary school. By targeting children and families in their immediate social surroundings, MOCEP provides a potentially cost-effective approach for meeting some of the critical social and educational needs that lie at the heart of disadvantaged communities. When home-intervention programmes support and build upon a community's already existing strengths, they have a better chance of acceptance and success.

The MOCEP programme in Bahrain is currently under the auspices of the Bahrain Red Crescent Society, BRCS.

*Detailed analysis (date, tables, figures, charts, etc.) and results are available in the book, *Poverty Begins at Home, MOCEP, Kingdom of Bahrain* (Hadeed, in press, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.).

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