The LEGO Playful Parenting Implementation Research project is a five-year research award studying five playful parenting interventions working with children aged 0–3 in Bhutan, Guatemala, Rwanda, Serbia, and Zambia. The project is helping define ‘what works’ for effective scaling of playful parenting interventions and what impact these interventions have on caregivers, service providers, and children.

With particular attention to the LEGO Foundation’s Learning through Play (LtP) philosophy, the implementation research harmonizes data collection efforts across programs and partners to distill findings for the larger early childhood development community.

Implementation Research
As the research and learning partner on the LEGO Foundation’s Playful Parenting portfolio, FHI 360 collaborates with partners to embed a robust research agenda into each program. The implementation research features five research questions focused on different outcomes & processes related to implementation including, child & caregiver outcomes, community norms & engagement, the workforce, programmatic factors, and the enabling environment. By examining components of implementation at different levels of the system, the research considers both vertical and horizontal pathways to scale for each program.

Child & Caregiver Outcomes
Play can be powerful in driving a child’s developmental growth across cognitive, socioemotional, and physical domains. When it comes to the relationship between children and caregivers, play offers an avenue to foster positive and developmentally stimulating interactions.

FHI 360 employs a quasi-experimental design to examine child outcomes and caregiver knowledge via direct observations, structured interviews, and standardized assessments. In an effort to harmonize data collection efforts with Playful Parenting partners, FHI 360 mirrors instruments used by partners, in addition to driving the use of
internationally standardized and validated measures, such as the Global Scale for Early Development (GSED).

As partner programs go to scale, they will reach more and more children & caregivers across their countries of implementation. FHI 360 builds on partner’s existing MEL efforts to examine the extent to which child & caregiver outcomes are sustained at scale.

**Workforce**

Evidence links a well-trained and supported workforce to positive developmental outcomes.1 The workforce, from community health workers to national health assistants to volunteers, sits at the frontlines of all five Playful Parenting programs. This same workforce thus represents a core component of FHI 360’s research design. By examining roll out of training and supervision; workforce motivation and retention; and quality of service provision, FHI 360 seeks to support partners in understanding workforce competencies and capacity during the process of scale up. The research tracks workforce across time through standardized knowledge assessments pre- and post-training, surveys and observations in the months following training, and annual qualitative interviews to paint a clearer picture of their knowledge, capacities, challenges, and motivations.

**Community Norms & Enabling Environment**

The policy and institutional environment, as well as the community norms around parenting, form the bedrock for integrating play-based parenting interventions into national systems. FHI 360 examines how these factors shape scale-up through a blend of focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with caregivers, including a targeted father engagement guide, as well as key informant interviews (KIIs) with government stakeholders at multiple levels of the system. Father engagement represents a key theme in the research, with gendered norms manifesting differently in each context of implementation. FHI 360’s selected measures of community norms, and more specifically father engagement, offer insights into how communities view roles of fathers, mothers, and other caregivers in childcare. Government KIIs yield critical feedback on how stakeholders perceive the importance of play and scalability of programs in real-time as partners move to scale.

**Community of Practice**

In addition to conducting rigorous research on playful parenting programs, FHI 360 facilitates a community of practice amongst the LEGO Foundation’s Playful Parenting partners. By employing experiential, playful facilitation styles, FHI 360 aims to cultivate a community space that enables transparent exchange and problem solving between partners. FHI 360 holds regular CoP meetings to disseminate findings from the implementation research, offer partners opportunities to share programmatic experiences, and jointly tackle challenges uncovered through the research and implementation. Grounded in leading adult learning pedagogies, the CoP pushes community members to engage more deeply with the research, and work as a collective to pursue pathways to scale for their programs.

1 https://www.earlychildhoodworkforce.org/About

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**About FHI 360:** FHI 360 is a global organization that mobilizes research, resources and relationships so people everywhere have access to the opportunities they need to lead full and healthy lives. With collaborations in over 60 countries, we work directly with local leaders to advance social and economic equity, improve health and well-being, respond to humanitarian crises and strengthen community resilience. We share data-driven insights and scalable tools that expand access and equity so communities can effectively address complex challenges, respond to shocks and achieve thriving futures.

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