



DW DEVELOPMENT
WORKSHOP

Knowledge, attitude and practice study of early childhood development in Namibia

2024

KEY FINDING SUMMARY

With financial
support from

INTER + TEAM

INTRODUCTION



587

household
surveys

12

parent interviews

7

focus group
discussions

43

parents of children
aged 0-6 years

9

professionals in
the ECD field

The period from conception to school going age is a period of rapid brain development. When a child receives optimal nurturing care during this time, she or he benefits from improved education and health outcomes, better wellbeing and greater lifetime earnings compared with those who do not receive this care. As such, the knowledge, attitude and practice of parents can define each child's future.

Development Workshop Namibia (DWN), in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPEWSW), undertook a study to understand the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of households related to early childhood development (ECD). This KAP study was based on data collected in eight regions across Namibia in the urban (formal and informal) and rural areas. **The study regions were //Kharas, Khomas, Erongo, Omaheke, Otjozondjupa, Oshana, Kunene and Zambezi.** The study included 587 household surveys, 12 parent interviews, seven focus group discussions with 43 parents of children aged 0-6 years as well as interviews with nine professionals in the ECD field. Most of the data was collected in November-December 2023.

The purpose of this study is to enable an improved understanding of parenting practices and attitudes in Namibia. These results will be used to tailor ECD interventions to help strengthen child development opportunities across the country. This short document presents some of the key findings. For recommendations derived from these findings, please review the full report. All of the data are accessible and can be interrogated using our online dashboard.

<https://dw-namibia.org/e cd-kap-study.php>



One important finding was that the knowledge, attitude and practice of parents vary considerably according to region and settlement type (urban-formal or informal, or rural areas). The most striking differences are highlighted here.

RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING



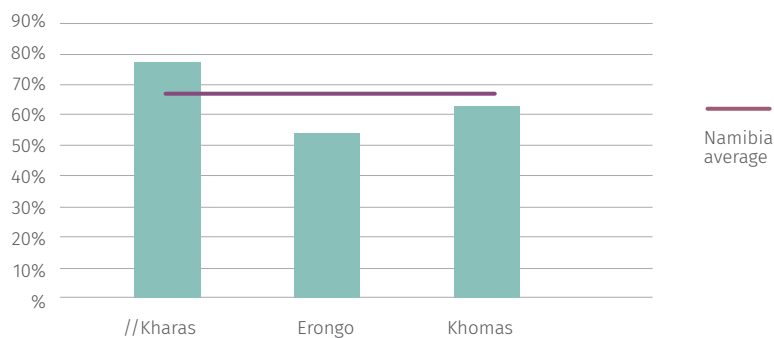
EMOTIONAL WARMTH

Many parents view their main roles as providing for the child and keeping them safe. Around half of parents do not regularly hug their children.

“All you need to do is to take great care of the kid, feed them and protect them.”

Focus group discussion (FGD) participant, woman

Someone in the household cuddled the child/ren in the past week, by region



“All you need to do is to take great care of the kid, feed them and protect them.” Focus group discussion (FGD) participant, woman

When their children are upset, most parents (84%) reported comforting their child and responding to their needs.



ROLE OF FATHERS

Fathers are less engaged than mothers in parenting, especially when it comes to factors beyond providing for basic needs.

In 74% of households, it was reported that the mother or other female relatives carried out most caregiving activities in the last week. In 53% of households, respondents reported agreeing that the father’s main role in parenting is to provide financially, with this proportion rising to 75% in Kunene region.

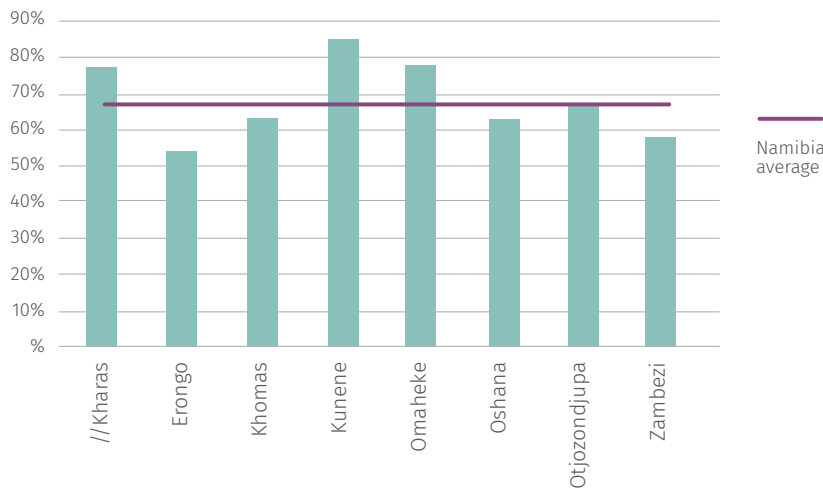


GENDERED PARENTING

Girls and boys are socialised differently from an early age, for example with different chores and games.



% households reporting that “girls and boys must be raised differently”, by region



“Girls and boys are socialised differently from an early age, for example with different chores and games.”



NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Children with disabilities are often excluded from ECD centres, which may be linked to social stigma.

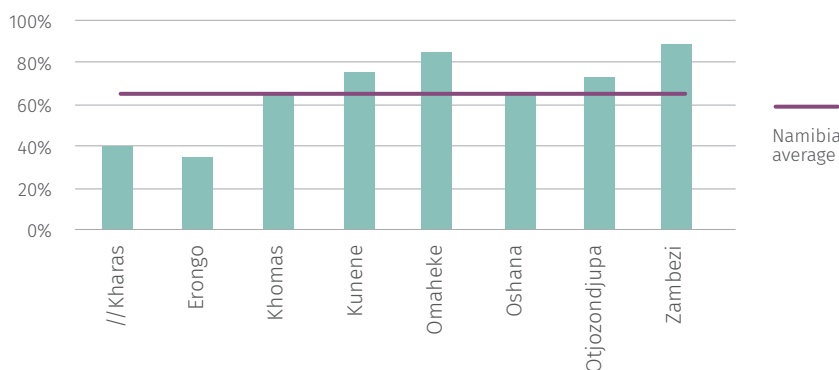
“Parents with a child with a disability are afraid of the reaction of the community.” FGD, man



TREATMENT OF ORPHANS

Orphans and non-biological children are reportedly treated equally to biological children in 65% of households in their communities, leaving 35% responding to the contrary. Parents in //Kharas and Erongo regions were less likely to report that orphans were treated equally.

% households reporting that “step-children/orphans are treated the same as biological children in the home in my community”, by region



“It is more difficult for women. Men only buy food and clothes. Women always prefer their own child.”

Orphans may be more likely to suffer when it comes to soft factors (rather than provision of food, shelter and healthcare), the responsibility for which is likely to fall to mothers in Namibian homes.

“It is more difficult for women. Men only buy food and clothes. Women always prefer their own child.” FGD, man

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY LEARNING



VALUING THE EARLY YEARS

Just 2% of parents reported that learning starts at age 0 years. This may be linked to the reported focus of parents on school-type learning (reading, writing and counting).

Over a third of parents (36%) reported that they would prioritise the financial needs of older children over those of younger children – despite the fact that investing in the early years provides the greater return.

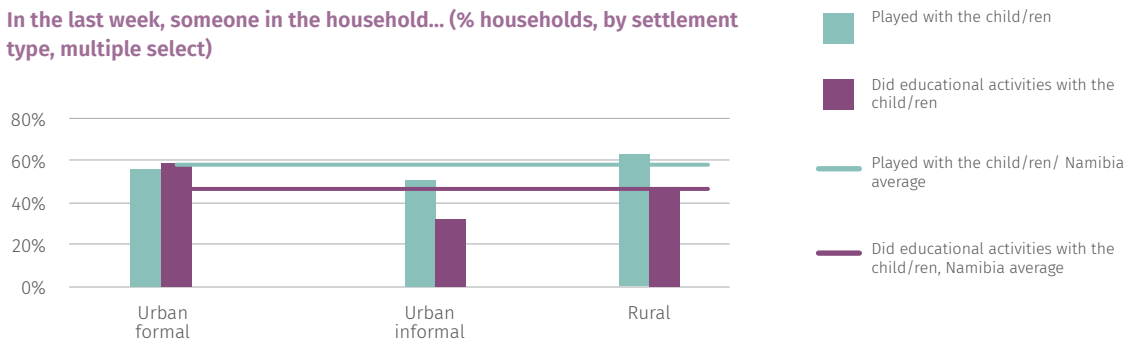


ROLE OF PLAY

Around half of parents do not regularly play with or do educational activities with their children.

“There is nothing that a child can get from playing” Parent interview, woman

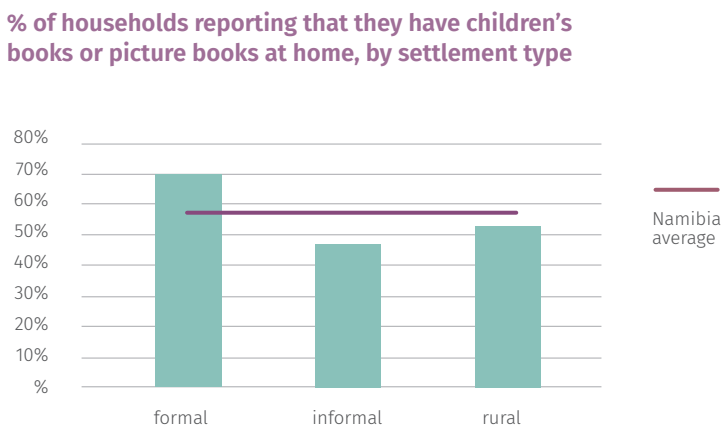
In the last week, someone in the household... (% households, by settlement type, multiple select)



READING AND BOOKS

The vast majority (90%) of respondents agreed that reading for babies is important for their language development. However, only 57% of households reported having children’s books or picture books, with children in urban-informal and rural areas less likely to have books than those in urban-formal areas.

% of households reporting that they have children’s books or picture books at home, by settlement type





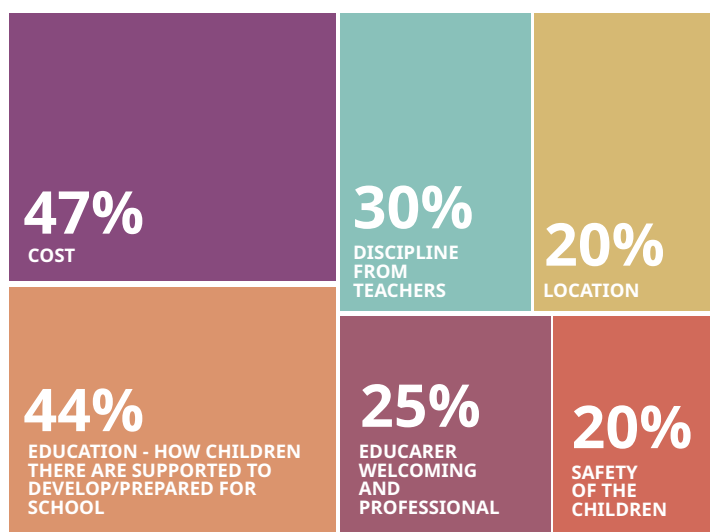
ECD CENTRE STARTING AGE, AND CENTRE QUALITY

Many parents opt to send their children to ECD centres to prepare for school. Parents tend to focus on school learning at the centre, such as reading, writing and counting.

“[When selecting an ECD centre,] I compared the activities taught in the school with those in the ECD centre. If they are the same, I think the centre is good.” Parent interview, man

When selecting an ECD centre, many parents cite considering practical factors (such as cost and location), with many also mentioning school preparation. Meanwhile, just a tiny minority (7%) mention possibility for play.

Factors considered by parents when selecting a kindergarten/ECD centre/pre-school for their child



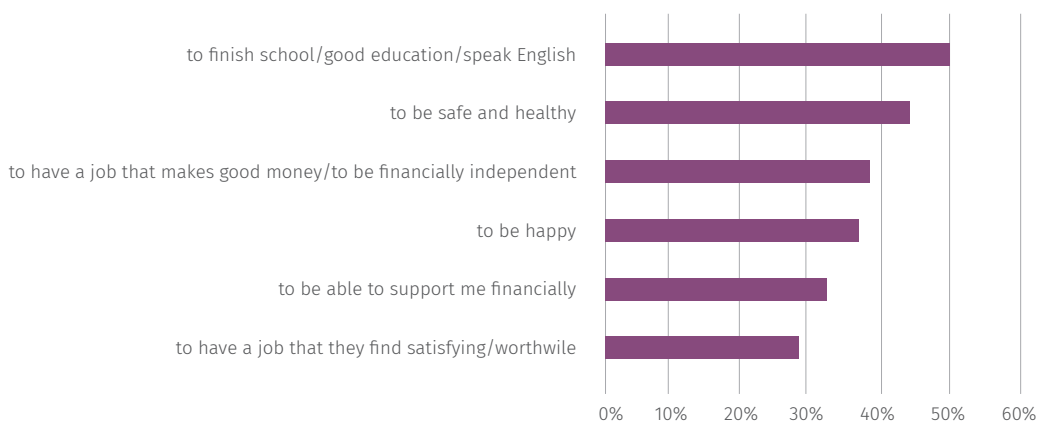
“[When selecting an ECD centre,] I compared the activities taught in the school with those in the ECD centre. If they are the same, I think the centre is good.” Parent interview, man



PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS

Namibian parents are focused on good educational and financial opportunities for their children as they grow.¹

Parent’s aspirations for their children, by % households



¹ Enumerators were trained to ask this question openly, and select the corresponding responses. It was possible to select multiple responses to this question.

SAFETY AND SECURITY



VIOLENCE IN THE HOME

Almost a third of households (32%) reported that the mother was exposed to stress or violence during pregnancy.

Beating young children is extremely common in Namibian families, with around half of parents (49%) reporting this response to misbehaving children.

“The parents in the community use a lot of violence. They also use bad language towards kids.” Parental interview, woman

In cases of abuse, most respondents reported that police and governmental referral systems (MGEPESW/MoHSS) would be used. On the other hand, over a third of households reported that child abuse is managed within the family (37%).²



“The parents in the community use a lot of violence. They also use bad language towards kids.” Parental interview, woman

GOOD HEALTH

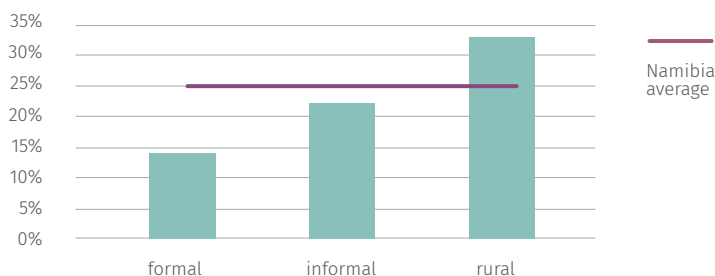


HEALTH IN PREGNANCY

In a quarter (25%) of households, mothers reportedly drank alcohol and/or smoked tobacco during pregnancy. This tendency seems to be stronger in rural areas. Qualitative data indicates that this could be linked to poor understanding of the effects of alcohol on the foetus.

“At the hospital they tell us that if you take hard things (strong alcohol) it will burn the baby in the stomach. And you will give birth to a child with burnt skin. If you only drink light things (for example, cider), it will have no effect on the unborn baby.” FGD, woman

% of households reporting that during the pregnancy, the mother drank alcohol and/or smoked tobacco, by settlement type



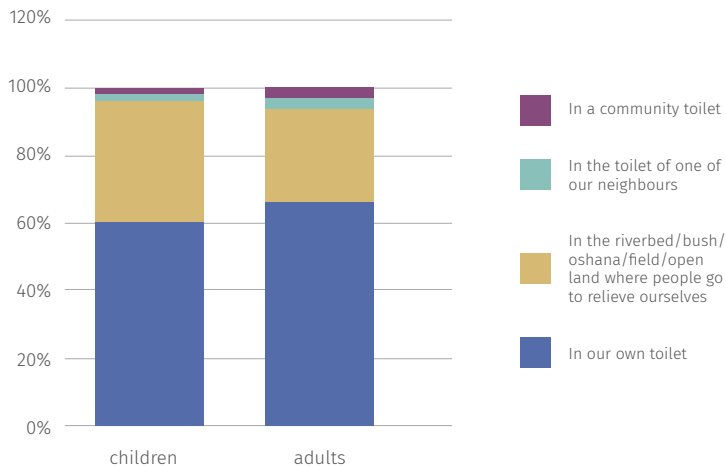
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SAFE SANITATION

Access to toilets varies considerably among different regions, and in some places children are excluded from toilet access.

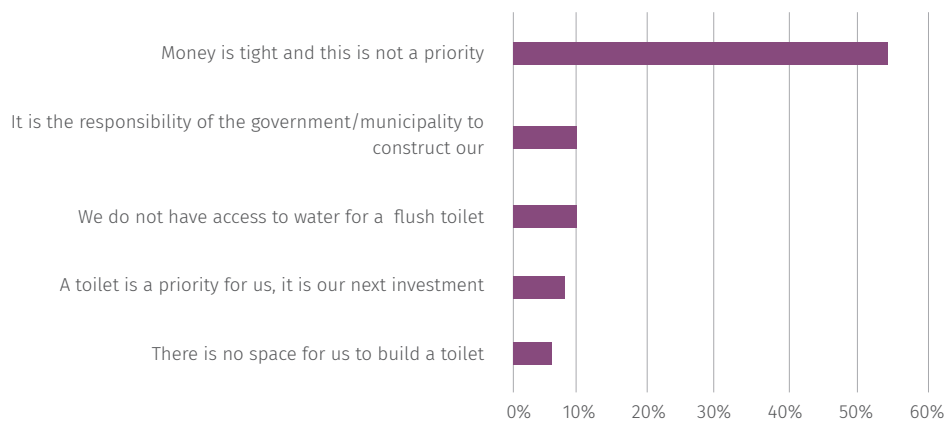
Where it is reported that children and adults in household go to relieve themselves (% households)



Across Namibia eight years ago, it was reported that almost half (46%) of households had no toilet access (NSA, 2017), which this survey found to have fallen to 36% for children and 28% for adults.

Amongst the households reporting that they do not yet have their own toilet (193 households, 33% of total), the most common reason was lack of money to build toilets.

Principal reason why do not yet have a toilet (amongst those without), % households



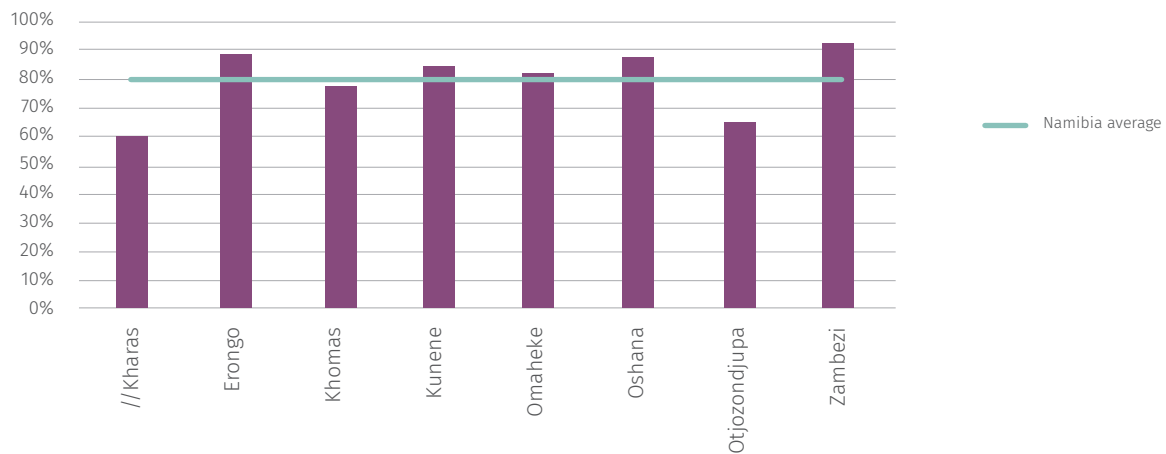
NUTRITION



BREASTFEEDING PRACTICE

In most households surveyed (80%), children were exclusively breastfed for six months. However, this was lower in rural areas (73%), and in the //Kharas (60%) and Otjozondjupa (65%) regions.

Children exclusively breastfed for 6 months (% households by region)



NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS

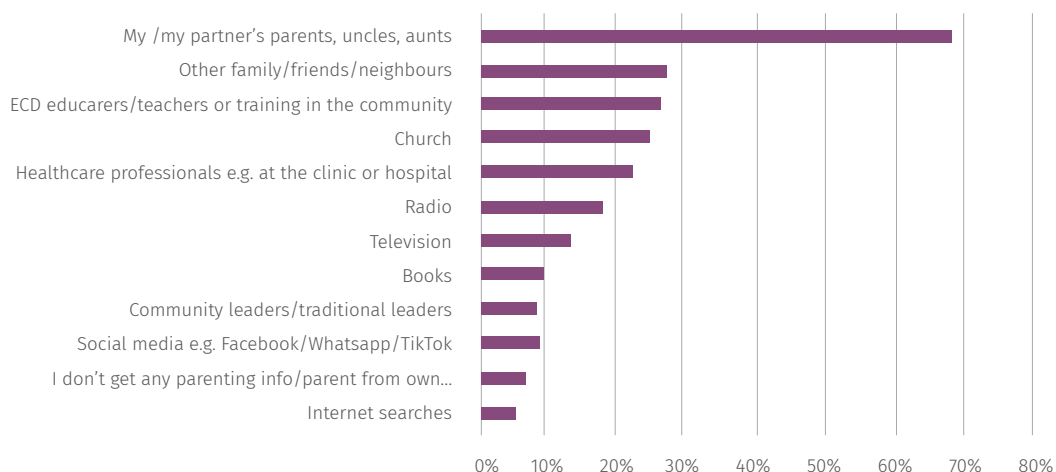
The importance of young children accessing nutritious food is not always recognised, and there is some indication of males being prioritised, with respondents in 28% of households reporting that males require more meat and eggs.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Parents access information in a variety of ways. Across the board, the greatest influence on parenting seems to be direct family.

“All we know is from our parents, we were not exposed other information” Rural survey respondent

Sources of parenting information, by % households



Parental information sources vary according to region and between urban and rural areas. Urban-informal households were more likely to report using the radio (30%), while in rural areas, the church was a particularly common source (30%). Regionally, television as a parenting source was commonly cited in //Karas (30%), while Khomas households mentioned social media more often (17%). The church was a top information source in Zambezi and Omaheke (65% and 40% respectively), while radio emerged as an important source in Oshana, Kunene and Otjozondjupa (39%, 36% and 27%).

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