

## **Promoting Early Learning of Children under Five Years in an Economically Disadvantaged Community in Sri Lanka through Health Promotion Approach**

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**Abstract :** Investing in Early Learning can improve children's interests for education and makes them ready for school. Children in economically disadvantaged communities may have reduced readiness for schools. Health Promotion approach enables communities including disadvantaged to control over their health. Mothers of children under the age five in 'Alapathwewa' community (n=40) were selected as the sample with the aim to promote early learning of children to improve their school readiness. Mothers in 'Morakeewa' community (n=40) were the control. Interventions were for a period of 2 years and children of these mothers were followed up to school entry. Importance of early learning and possibility of providing quality learning environments for children at a low cost was discussed with mothers in an experimental setting by facilitators. Mothers were enabled to make age-appropriate baby rooms which provide learning opportunities. Collective community playhouses and play areas were developed by mothers to provide opportunities for children to interact and learn with each other. Mothers started discussing with each other and sharing experiences. The progress was monitored by mothers at regular intervals. Data regarding school competencies of children were obtained from school teachers. School teachers measured thirteen competencies of children on a scale of 'very good, good, moderate and weak'. All children in the experimental group were in 'very good' level in two competencies, 'communicate friendly with others' and 'express ideas well'. Children in the experimental group reported a significantly higher achievement of all thirteen competencies ( $p < .05$ ) than children in control. Providing quality early learning environments for children even in economically disadvantaged settings makes them ready for schools. Through a Health Promotion approach, early learning experiences for children can be provided at a low cost.

**Keywords :** disadvantaged, early learning, economically, health promotion

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