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## DEVELOPMENTAL INDICATORS: SOME EXAMPLES FROM LATIN AMERICA

In many Latin American countries creative efforts are being made to develop and/or adapt instruments designed to measure the psychosocial development of children from birth to six years of age. Throughout the world, efforts are being made to improve the chances of survival and the quality of life of children, particularly during the early years. In order to implement strategies and to provide services in the most effective way, it is often necessary to identify those children who are at greatest risk of presenting developmental problems. Once programs are implemented it is also necessary to evaluate their impact on children's development and family functioning. In order to do this, measurement instruments are required, the characteristics of which should be adequate and appropriate for the task at hand.

Although the need for such measures has now become accepted in many places throughout Latin America, the importance of ensuring their adequate design and validity has not received as much attention. The failure to use appropriate measures can cause considerable damage to the children and families who the services intend to help. Children and families in need of services may go unidentified. Limited resources will be used inefficiently to the detriment of the implementation and spread of early intervention services. It is therefore important to ensure that the instruments being developed and in use today in Latin America possess the characteristics necessary to function adequately within the context in which they are being used.

This is not an easy task. The measurement of psychosocial development and of factors related to it, such as the quality of childrearing environments, is in and of itself quite complex. The identification of relevant risk factors and the detection of developmental difficulties are even more so. Added to this initial complexity are the requirements of simplicity and cultural relevance imposed by the programs in which the instruments are to be used. In addition, limited economic resources often represent important obstacles to the adequate development and validation of such instruments.

In spite of these problems, innovative efforts have been made throughout the region and many promising alternatives now exist. As examples of instruments that are in use in various locations, we mention the following:

- CHILE:** Escala de Evaluación de Desarrollo Psicomotor (EEDP)  
Test de Evolución Psicomotor (TEPSI)
- COSTA RICA:** Escala de Desarrollo Integral del Niño (EDIN). Adapted for use in Guatemala
- BRAZIL:** Escala de Desarrollo de Heloise Marhino (EDHM)
- COLOMBIA:** Pautas de Desarrollo Infantil en los Primeros Seis Años  
Escala Abreviada de Desarrollo. Adapted for use in Bolivia  
Escala de Valoración Cualitativa del Desarrollo Infantil
- MEXICO:** Escala de Desarrollo  
Hoja Gráfica de Desarrollo
- JAMAICA:** A Child Status Profile

In addition, the Denver Developmental Screening Test is widely used in the region. Many countries include in their health card indicators of the physical development of children.

Where a profile or instrument for measuring development is present and used, that instrument can be drawn upon, but attention should be given to the specific purposes behind applying the instrument as well as to its reliability, validity and cultural appropriateness. The help of local experts may be sought to provide interpretations of the instruments and their results.

It is possible, also, to look for proxies of development, including the nutritional and health status of children using, for instance, such standard indicators as weight or height for age. If this is done, the program developer should realize that the correspondence between nutritional status and mental or emotional development is far from one to one.

The main point is that an effort should be made to establish the actual condition of the development of children and instruments are available that can help do that. Describing the actual status of the development of children in a specific setting can help define the population of children to whom the project will be directed. It can also help to set a basis for evaluating a project later on.

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