National Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program

Final Report

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'Investing' in Our Children

President Clinton repeatedly says that, as a society, we need to "invest" in the future and especially in our children. This is understandably popular. As a people, Americans rightly feel ashamed that a nation so rich still has so many poor children. And most parents constantly worry about their children's futures.

The president's rhetoric reaches these anxieties, which may be one reason why his latest personal scandal hasn't yet dented his approval ratings. He seems to care about things that matter. The trouble is that the rhetoric, though appealing, isn't believable.

It is not that government can do no good for children. It has improved their material well-being. Poor children almost certainly live better today in terms of housing, health care, diets and schooling than ever before. This may seem hard to believe, given the high official poverty rate for children: 21 percent in 1996. But this familiar statistic is misleading, because it counts only people's cash income and ignores food stamps, Medicaid and other noncash government support. These reduce poverty by a third, to 14 percent.

The President's Council of Economic Advisers recently reviewed studies of children's well-being and found steady gains. Less than 2 percent of children go hungry in a year because their families can't afford food. Children from families below the poverty line are visiting doctors more often; for those in "fair or poor health," the average number of visits rose from 11 a year in the late 1980s to 14 in the mid-1990s. Housing has improved. In 1978, about 9 percent of children lived in crowded housing (more than one person per room); by the 1990s, this was 6 percent.

But these material gains have not prevented social breakdown: neighborhoods with too much crime, an explosion of single-parent families, the glorification of instant gratification. Government hasn't generally done what Clinton thinks it ought to do. It has not been able to "invest," in the sense

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that what's spent today will make poor recipients more productive, self-reliant and responsible people tomorrow. The latest evidence of this comes from the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP).

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Under the CCDP, young mothers received home visits every two weeks from "case managers," who taught parenting skills, advised on personal problems and identified useful government services. About 4,400 families were enrolled in the study. Half received the extra counseling; half (the "control" group) didn't. All were below the government's poverty line; 58 percent were single mothers; 51 percent had not finished high school; 35 percent had had their first child before 18. Annual spending was high: $15,768 per family. This amount (equal to or greater than their cash income) covered only the extra counseling. It excluded other government payments—for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid—that families also received.

And the result? Here's what Abt Associates, a research firm, concluded: "CCDP did not produce any important positive effects on participating families." Many mothers did make progress. Some went to school. Some got jobs. Probably many became better parents. But the same progress—or lack of it—occurred among the control group that didn't get extra counseling.

The similarities are stunning. After five years, 40 percent of the mothers in the program had jobs; so did 41 percent of the mothers in the control group. Their weekly wages ($245 and $239) were almost identical. Similarly, 68 percent of families in both groups received food stamps. The results for children were also the same. At the age of 5, the children in the program scored 81.1 on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; children not in the program scored 81.0. Children in both groups visited doctors at the same rate; there were no differences in behavioral problems.

To use Clinton's language: the return on this investment for society was zero. It was a waste of money. This does not mean that the experiment was a mistake. Demonstration projects aim to show what works and what doesn't. The theory behind the program seemed humane and workable. The experiment cost $326 million over nine years. It is now being discontinued. Perhaps we have saved ourselves billions. But the broad results also suggest two obvious lessons about the rhetoric of "investing."

The first is that what people do for themselves matters more than what government tries to do for them. Government should provide social services and income support for the desperately poor. But these are more expressions of collective decency than "investments." And there is a dilemma. A society that is too free with its decency will promote dependency. It will induce those who could do for themselves to let someone else do for them.

The second lesson is that the "investments" that truly count for children come from parents: love and security, discipline and instruction, a sense of worth. Being rich is no guarantee that parents will provide these; being poor is no indicator that they won't. But large federal programs, whatever their benefits, can't undo parental failure. Nor can they offset the ill effects of family breakdown. To think otherwise sanctions the behaviors that put children at risk.

If society can "invest" its way out of social problems, then individuals are relieved of responsibility. Marriage loses its social value. Young men can father and abandon children. Mothers and fathers can easily leave troubled marriages. Americans once embraced a moral code that had strong taboos against these behaviors. Though often violated, the taboos imposed useful restraints. Perhaps we need old morality more than new investment.

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Michael Kelly

Would You Believe He's a Victim?

Much in the discussion of whatever transpired between Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton has been repulsive, but the performance of the president's defenders on "Meet the Press" last Sunday was a benchmark.

The height of the performance came when Tim Russert asked Arkansas columnist and Clinton apologist Gene Lyons this question: "Do you believe that the amount of circumstantial evidence that has been produced thus far—37 visits from Monica Lewinsky to the White House after she left, gifts being sent in, recordings on her home answering machine from the president, job offers at the United Nations, a job at the Pentagon, Revlon company, at American Express—does that create, in your mind, some concern that there may have been an inappropriate relationship between the president and Monica Lewinsky?"

Lyons admitted that no one would believe him if he claimed the evidence did not raise such a concern. With that wisp of a demurral out of the way, he went on to posit an alternative reading of the evidence: "a totally innocent relationship in which the president was, in a sense, the victim of someone rather like the woman who followed David Letterman around."

He added: "There's no evidence that I've seen so far that would indicate anything else. If you take someone like the president, who a lot of women would find attractive if he came to fix their garbage disposal, and you make him the president of the United States, the Alpha male of the United States of America, and you sexualize his image with a lot of smears and false accusations so that people think he's Tom Jones or Rod Stewart, then a certain irreducible number of women are going to act batty around him. And I'm not talking about her personally; I'm saying that's a prediction. And so there's every possibility, with what we've seen, that this could be an entirely innocent affair."

So, there you have the latest variation of what the president's spin 'n' smear artists like to call an "alternative narrative" in the Lewinsky matter. The president is a victim of Monica the Stalker (not that Lyons was talking about Lewinsky "personally"; no, no, as the clever man was careful to say, we're just musing out loud here about "predictions"). Well, of course it makes perfect sense. She's a woman, isn't she? And Clinton is a man, isn't he? And he's not any man, but the sort of man "a lot of women would find attractive if he came to fix their garbage disposal." And we know what women do with hunky garbage-disposal repairmen, don't we, boys? Of course, we do; Penthouse tells us. What's more, Clinton is not, in fact, a lowly repairman of household appliances. Why, he's "the Alpha male of the United States of America," in the presence of whom "a certain irreducible number of women are going to act batty" and fall deluded to long-running, highly detailed fantasies in which they are obliged to perform hurried, loveless acts of sexual service upon His Alphaship, and are then cast aside. Again, as every Penthouse reader knows, the stuff of every schoolgirl's dreams.

> *"What's a president to do with a stalker but give her gifts, find her a lawyer and advance her career?"*

The poor man. The poor *victim*. My God, how he must have suffered. Stalked through the halls of his own home, and nowhere to turn for protection. Nothing standing between him and a 21-year-old stalker armed with—well never mind what she was armed with. Nothing except for his wife, his chief of staff, his deputy chief of staff, his secretary, his personal assistant, his special assistants, his National Security Council, his Marine guard, three dozen or so Secret Service agents and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. What's a president to do with a stalker but give her gifts, find her a lawyer and advance her career?

The president has offered, sequentially, three reasons why he cannot himself say what happened: that he had to gather the facts; that he could not speak because of the rules of the courts; and that he dare not speak for fear that Ken Starr would twist his words against him. None of these arguments makes sense if Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky was, as Gene Lyons put it, "a totally innocent affair." They all make sense, though, if Clinton needs time to see what all the evidence against him is before he presents the official alternative narrative.

Leon Panetta, Clinton's former White House chief of staff, said this weekend that the president "at some point . . . has got to tell the American people the truth of what was behind this relationship." Some point is now. By allowing his apparatchiks to continue to float "predictions" and lies and smears on his behalf, Clinton not only debases himself, he debases the presidency. If there is a true alternative narrative, the president must present it, before more damage is done.

Michael Kelly is a senior writer for National Journal.

Title: Investing in Children Wisely

Juvenile delinquency and child abuse and neglect are major concerns in America today, and a fundamental disagreement swirling around these problems is about the value of prevention programs. While many believe that these programs have failed, a more accurate assessment reveals that they have never really been given a chance to succeed -- always applied too little, too late, and without a careful transfer of science to policy.

The recent release of the results of the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP) is a case in point (see "Investing in Children" by Robert Samuelson, Washington Post, February 18, 1998). This program was designed to prevent health and developmental problems on the part of the child and to promote low-income families' economic self-sufficiency by working with parents during pregnancy and the early years of the child's life. The results of the program, however, show virtually no greater benefits to those families who received CCDP than to those assigned to a control group.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the CCDP findings that all programs designed to support poor families' efforts to become more self-reliant and responsible in the care of their children are wasteful. The results of carefully conducted research over the past 20 years, most recently published in the August 27, 1997 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association,* show that nurse home visitors are succeeding where CCDP did not. Working with low-income families during pregnancy and the first two years of the child's life, nurses in Elmira, New York and Memphis, Tennessee made substantial differences in the lives of the mothers and children. In Elmira, a recently completed study followed the families for 15 years after delivery of the first child. In contrast to counterparts assigned to a control group, low-income, unmarried, mostly white women visited at home by nurses had:

79% fewer state-verified cases of child abuse and neglect
31% fewer subsequent children
44% fewer behavioral problems due to the use of drugs and alcohol
69% fewer arrests
30 fewer months of welfare use

What is more, an economic evaluation of the program conducted by the Rand Corporation found that the government recovered its investment in this service by the time the children were four and that the cost savings over the life of the child far exceeded the investment. In Memphis, where the nurses worked with low-income African-American mothers, data also show that program benefits were maintained.

What is it that differentiates the Nurse Home Visitation program from the CCDP? On the surface, they appear to be similar. Both worked with mothers (and fathers) during pregnancy and the early years of the child's life. Both employed home visitors. Both helped parents make use of existing health and human services.

The distinguishing features of the Elmira/Memphis program provide clues about what may help other health and social services accomplish their goals. The Emira/Memphis program employed well-qualified nurses; CCDP staff were less thoroughly trained. In addition, the Elmira/Memphis program nurses had detailed protocols to guide their efforts in changing specific behaviors that contribute to poor pregnancy outcomes (such as cigarette smoking), child abuse (such as failing to interpret and respond appropriately to infant cries), and welfare dependence (such as failing to plan subsequent pregnancies or negotiate acceptable methods of contraception with partners). In contrast, CCDP's case managers had no carefully crafted protocols.

All too often, the essence of an effective program is watered down or lost in the process of being scaled up. With support from the U.S. Department of Justice, the Elmira/Memphis program is being established in a number of high-crime neighborhoods around the country to determine how its fundamental features can be reproduced in other communities. In this way, we are carefully maintaining the crucial link between good science, policy, and practice.

Skepticism about programs that promise to save lives and money is understandable, but there is reason to be hopeful. Rigorous scientific evidence now indicates that a variety of other prevention programs (such as the Life-Skills curriculum to prevent substance abuse, Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring, and therapeutic foster care) can prevent a host of later problems. The role of government is to partner with local communities in seeding and replicating proven programs, while maintaining the integrity of their design. Our success or failure will depend on how we go about our work.

To those who believe that government investments cannot make a difference in the lives of at-risk children, we counter that there are preciously few deliberate attempts to link good research with policy and practice. Until prevention has legitimately been tried and found wanting, this country needs to intensify its commitment to stopping delinquency, abuse and neglect before they start.

David Olds is Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Kempe Prevention Research Center for Family and Child Health at the University of Colorado. He served on the scientific technical advisory panel of the Comprehensive Child Development Program and was the scientific director of the Elmira and Memphis studies.

Shay Bilchik is Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

Evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program

In 1988, Congress, concerned about extremely at-risk low-income young children and families, created the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP). As implemented, the CCDP tested whether a newly designed community service delivery program that identified family needs and referred families to different services would result in improved developmental outcomes for children and self-sufficiency for families. HHS, which administered the program, released an evaluation with the finding that the CCDP did not produce the results sought. Though the final evaluation was issued today, HHS had preliminary reports of the less than successful program results. HHS has already incorporated important lessons from CCDP, especially that of the need to provide intensive services that directly affect young children's developmental experiences, into the design of the new Early Head Start and the revised performance standards of the entire Head Start program to assure better outcomes for young children and their families.

What is the CCDP?

Between 1989 and 1993, 34 demonstration projects were funded, with 21 the subject of evaluation research by Abt Associates and CSR, Inc. Case managers linked families to specific services in their communities or programs created services within their agencies to meet particular family needs. In general, the families were comprised of young, largely minority, very low-income mothers with low educational attainment who tended to be single, unemployed and dependent on public assistance. The evaluation randomly assigned over 4,000 families to either an experimental or control group. In 1994, Congress directed a phased closing of the projects by 1998.

No significant results compared to other families

Both interim and final evaluation results of the CCDP showed that there were no consistent differences for families participating in the program as compared to families who did not. The Abt Associates' evaluation did find that "changes were observed in the lives of CCDP families (e.g., increases in children's achievement scores, in the percentage of mothers in the labor force, and in average household income). However, exactly the same kind of changes observed in CCDP families also occurred in control group families." The evaluation offered several possible reasons for the results of the program, including initial difficulties in implementing the projects, in some cases project families may have been unintentionally referred to services of low or poor quality, the project relied on indirect efforts (such as primarily focusing on helping parents improve their parenting skills) which could not directly improve child outcomes on their own, and some families were resourceful enough to find services in their own community. However, the most compelling finding was that the program did not provide sufficiently direct intensive child development services to be effective.

Intensive early childhood services work

The most productive result of the demonstration is a clear understanding that intensive, focused services provided directly to children and linked to distinctly defined outcomes are critical to success. As the evaluation asserted, several recent studies confirm that early childhood programs achieve important benefits and the most impressive long-term effects on children's cognitive development and on mothers' parenting skills and behaviors when the families participated in intensive early childhood programs. The evaluation confirms, "...the best way to achieve positive effects is to provide intensive services directly to the individuals that you hope to affect."

Early Head Start and Head Start already focus on direct intensive child services

Already, the lessons from the CCDP have been incorporated into the policies and designs of Early Head Start and the newly revised performance standards for the entire Head Start program to provide more effective interventions for young children and families in poverty. In both Early Head Start and Head Start, intensive learning and developmental services are provided directly to children and their families, combined with connections to other community services to meet family needs. For Early Head Start, which serves children aged 0 to 3, the key program elements are intensive child development, engaging parents as partners in the developmental process of their children and supporting them in improving their self-sufficiency. These principles are also included in the new Head Start Performance Standards guiding the programs serving three- and four-year-old children. Those Standards now more clearly define appropriate and necessary linkages of the program's central child development mission to community-based health, mental health, social service and employment services. The Head Start combination of direct intensive services to children and referrals to supplemental services reflect the best research and evaluation of how to achieve effective and long-term results for children and their families. In 1998, Head Start will benefit approximately 830,000 children and their families, including about 38,000 low-income infants and toddlers in Early Head Start. With the Balanced Budget Act of 1996, Head Start will reach President Clinton's goal of serving 1 million children in 2002.

JUDGMENT CALLS

INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN

Sorry. Government programs can't undo most of the ill effects of family breakdown.

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

PRESIDENT CLINTON REPEATEDLY SAYS THAT, AS A society, we need to "invest" in the future and especially in our children. This is understandably popular. As a people, Americans rightly feel ashamed that a nation so rich still has so many poor children. And most parents constantly worry about their children's futures. The president's rhetoric reaches these anxieties, which may be one reason that his latest personal scandal hasn't yet dented his approval ratings. He seems to care about things that matter. The trouble is that the rhetoric, though appealing, isn't believable.

It is not that government can do no good for children. It has enhanced their material well-being. Poor children almost certainly live better today in terms of housing, health care, diets and schooling than ever before. This may seem hard to believe, given the high official poverty rate for children: 21 percent in 1996. But this familiar statistic is misleading, because it counts only people's cash income and ignores food stamps, Medicaid and other noncash government support. These reduce poverty by a third, to 14 percent.

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But these material gains have not prevented social breakdown: neighborhoods with too much crime, an explosion of single-parent families, the glorification of instant gratification. Government hasn't generally done what Clinton thinks it ought to do. It has not been able to "invest," in the sense that what's spent today will make poor recipients more productive, self-reliant and responsible people tomorrow. The latest evidence of this comes from the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP).

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The first is that what people do for themselves matters more than what government tries to do for them. Government should provide social services and income support for the desperately poor. But these are more expressions of collective decency than "investments." And there is a dilemma. A society that is too free with its decency will promote dependency. It will induce those who could do for themselves to let someone else do for them.

The second lesson is that the "investments" that truly count for children come from parents: love and security, discipline and instruction, a sense of worth. Being rich is no guarantee that parents will provide these; being poor is no indicator that they won't. But large federal programs, whatever their benefits, can't undo parental failure. Nor can they offset the ill effects of family breakdown. To think otherwise sanctions the behaviors that put children at risk.

If society can "invest" its way out of social problems, then individuals are relieved of responsibility. Marriage loses its social value. Young men can father and abandon children. Mothers and fathers can easily leave troubled marriages. Americans once embraced a moral code that had strong taboos against these behaviors. Though often violated, the taboos imposed useful restraints. Perhaps we need old morality more than new investment.

ing—with a 94 percent occupancy rate and yields at three times borrowing costs. Why? Japan's huge banks, which own most real estate, are balking at selling more than tiny, "symbolic" portions of bad-debt-encumbered property.

So, what's to buy? Ironically, the best deals right now may be back in the States, as Asia's corporate giants sell off U.S. real estate to pay down debt. But many see the Asians' new vulnerability at home as a historic chance to break in. That's particularly true in Japan, where "big bang" financial reforms are opening up billions more in Japanese pension and insurance assets to foreign managers (pay attention, Sandy: Citibank just signed a cross-remittance, or money-transfer plan, with the postal savings system). U.S. manufacturers with long experience in Asia are also bargaining hard. In recent weeks General Motors upped its investment in Indonesia and launched new joint-venture talks with Korea's Daewoo, despite a bitter divorce six years ago. "Several Korean automakers came to us a few months back with a lot of different opportunities they were throwing out," says spokesman Michael Meyerand. (At the same time GM is scaling back its Thailand plant's capacity by 60 percent, and has run into stalled demand in China. "We're looking at Asia in the long term," Meyerand explains.)

And they're not so easy to get. In countries like Indonesia, where foreign debt has bankrupted most major companies, foreclosure laws are virtually nonexistent. In Jakarta, "virtually every building is for sale," says Evelyn Khoo of property manager Colliers Jardine. "But nobody's buying—they're worried about political stability."

Just as important, decades of economic xenophobia don't just disappear in six months of crisis. On the contrary, Wall Street's intrusion into Asia's cozy markets, along with that of the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund, has incited a minibacklash. Thai regulators, for instance, agreed to open up the banking sector to foreign ownership—but foreigners must effectively give up their majority stakes after 10 years (no takers, needless to say; the Thai government has instead decided to nationalize three major banks). In South Korea the government is making it easier for foreigners to buy in—with 100 percent ownership allowed by the end of '98, as opposed to 26 percent only three months ago. And two weeks ago a presidential committee on reforming labor laws agreed to permit M&A-related layoffs for the first time, a key enticement for Wall Street types. But at the same time Korean tycoons, like many others in Asia, are refusing to sell their choicest assets—exactly the ones that foreigners want. Example: LG Group, Korea's third largest *chaebol*, recently increased its stake in its flagship LG Electronics to fend off a foreign takeover. "Serious fire sales will not start," says Lee Namuh of Samsung Securities, "until Korean companies' financial problems get more serious."

In Japan, too, foreign firms have found suspiciously few deals in the stagnant real-estate market, though it should be boom-

At Ford Motor, talks are underway to take a larger stake in Korea's bankrupt Kia Motors and to invest in a big new plant in the Philippines. "We plan to be a major player in Asia," says Ford spokesman John Spelich. "We are prepared to do whatever it takes that makes business sense to make that happen." In other deals Ssangyong Group, Korea's sixth largest chaebol, recently unloaded its paper-making company to Procter & Gamble.

But even big players, like Weill and Gary Wendt, say they don't expect too much too soon. "Time will tell," says GE Capital's Wendt. "It's not going to be 'Aha, let's let everybody in the world come in'." Weill agrees. "You don't do deals in Asia in a weekend," he says. "But I think the [search] will last." At least as long as the bargains do.

With ANASTASIA STANMEYER *in Hong Kong,* B. J. LEE *in Seoul,* HIDEKO TAKAYAMA *in Tokyo and* MAGGIE FORD *in Jakarta*