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# HOUSEHOLD DEMAND AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY-BASED CHILDCARE

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## KEY MESSAGES

- **Women in Ethiopia bear a disproportionate burden of childcare responsibilities, spending approximately eight times the amount of time that men do on childcare.** Childcare duties, while critical to the development of the child, could be holding back the earning potential of women and households, ultimately diminishing household income and poverty reduction efforts.
- **In a study in the Amhara region, we explore the demand for and social norms around external childcare services through a pilot intervention within the context of the Ethiopia Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP).** We find that the demand for childcare centers in rural areas is high, and the perceptions around external childcare services are favorable. More than 95 percent of potential beneficiary households expressed an interest in sending their children to childcare centers and anticipated sending their children for 4.6 days/week on average.
- **High demand was followed by high use of childcare centers:** Three-quarters of the PSNP households selected to take part in this intervention attended the training for caregivers, while 75 percent of the children attended the childcare centers.
- **The high demand and use of these childcare centers are indicative of the potential value these services could create for women to increase their engagement in income-generating activities.** Building on the resources developed in the context of this pilot, implementing agencies could benefit from the training and operational manuals developed in Ethiopia to deliver and evaluate these centers in other contexts within Ethiopia and beyond. Further research could also explore the impact of these services on

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

The World Bank's Gender Innovation Policy Initiative for Ethiopia (GIPIE) and Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice, in collaboration with Child Fund and the Food Security Directorate (FSD) of the Government of Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture, initiated a study within the Ethiopia Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP) to evaluate a pilot of rural childcare centers. The objective was to generate rigorous evidence on the impacts of providing rural childcare through the PSNP on individual and household outcomes. While the intervention and associated impact evaluation were suspended due to the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, the study provided valuable lessons on the demand for and social norms around external childcare services from a pre-program survey of 2,250 households in the study region and administrative attendance data on program use from the first months of implementation.

cognitive, psychosocial, and health outcomes for children, as well as individual labor supply, time use, income, and empowerment for caregivers. Such analysis could provide further evidence on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of these external childcare services to guide policy and investment decisions related to these interventions.

## PILOTING RURAL CHILDCARE IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA TO EASE GENDERED CONSTRAINTS

### **Childcare is a highly gendered task in Ethiopia.**

A survey collected by the Central Statistics Agency to measure time-use showed that women spend eight times more time caring for children than men (CSA, 2014). As a result, women caregivers have less time available to spend on income-generating activities. Interventions aiming to ease childcare responsibilities such as subsidized childcare services in Kenya and the provision of mobile childcare services in Burkina Faso have proven to be effective at improving women's participation in economic activities (Clark et al. 2019; Ajayi, Dao, and Koussoubé 2022).

### **Against this backdrop, the Ethiopia Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP) piloted and evaluated childcare centers within the program.**

In collaboration with Child Fund, the Africa Gender Innovation Lab, and the Food Security Directorate (FSD) of the Ministry of Agriculture with the generous financial support from the World Bank's Early Life Partnerships, the PSNP designed a pilot that would establish childcare centers in six woredas in the Northern part of the Amhara region. The childcare centers were located in the center of each of the pilot kebeles, with the kebele leadership able to choose between co-locating the facility at either a primary school, a health post, or a farmer training center. These centers were run by public work participants with the three-pronged goal of:

- providing a fun, safe, caring, and stimulating environment for young children 1-5 years old,
- fostering the sensory-motor, cognitive, language, and socioemotional skills development of children, and
- developing and promoting good caregiving practices.

The implementation was incorporated within a randomized controlled trial design with the goal of generating rigorous evidence on the impacts of providing rural childcare through the PSNP on individual and household outcomes. Specifically, project stakeholders identified 90 kebeles across the six project woredas that were eligible to receive the childcare centers. These kebeles were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a treatment group that would receive a childcare center and a control group that would not receive a childcare center. The control group serves as a counterfactual to measure the impacts of the childcare centers. In each kebele, 25 randomly selected childcare-eligible households (15 PSNP and 10 non-PSNP) were enrolled in the study and completed a baseline survey that interviewed primary caregivers who mostly are mothers. The survey covered time-use, attitudes towards childcare as well as farm and non-farm economic activities. Select non-PSNP households were granted access to the program with the goal of promoting it as a public good of the PSNP and enabling more women to undertake income-generating activities.

### **While the intervention and associated impact evaluation were suspended due to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, valuable lessons were learned about the demand for and the social norms around external childcare services.**

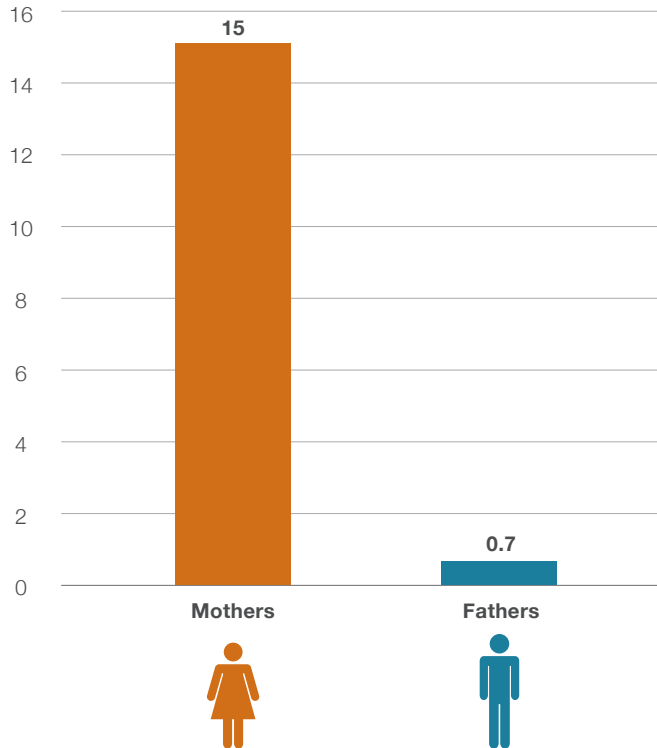
This brief presents findings from a pre-program survey of 2,250 households in the study region on the gender gap in care responsibilities as well as the demand for and perception around these services. Additionally, we present findings from administrative attendance data on program use from the first months of implementation before the program was suspended.

## WOMEN BEAR MUCH OF THE CHILDCARE TIME BURDEN WITH PERCEIVED IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR INCOME

### **Mothers and their daughters bear much of the childcare burden with little evidence of communal childcare arrangements.**

Mothers spend an average of 15 hours per day on childcare-related activities, far outpacing other members of the household, including fathers who spend an average of 0.7 hours (Figure 1). In study households with older siblings, sisters were found to spend four times more hours taking care of their

FIGURE 1:  
NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT ON CHILDCARE



younger siblings than brothers. Moreover, within these households, older sisters spent the second-highest number of hours on childcare after mothers. Notably, the data provide little evidence in support of existing communal childcare arrangements, with households reporting only around 0.7 hours/day of support from non-household members.

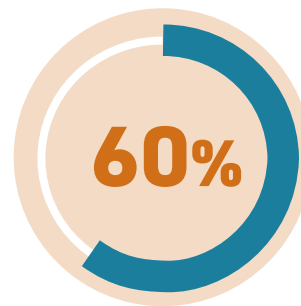
**Caregivers believe childcare responsibilities reduce their income.** Nearly 60 percent of caregivers believe they are earning less income due to their childcare responsibilities. Those who believe they are earning less because of their childcare responsibilities were asked how much they think they would be able to earn had there not been childcare duties. On average, these caregivers believe they would be able to generate an additional income of 34 dollars per month in the absence of their childcare responsibilities. This anticipated income corresponds to a 72 percent increase in monthly earnings for PSNP households and a 48 percent increase for non-PSNP households. It is, however, crucial to note that anticipated gains in income could vary from realized gains as the former is prone to bias.

## EXPRESSED AND DEMONSTRATED DEMAND FOR COMMUNITY CHILDCARE IS HIGH, WITH LIMITED EVIDENCE OF STRONG SOCIAL NORMS AGAINST THEIR USE

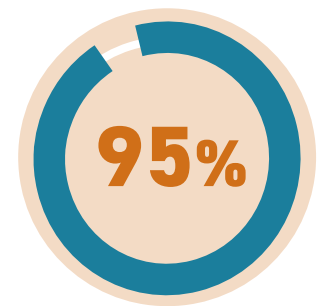
**The demand for childcare services is very high.** After receiving a brief description of the centers, more than 95 percent of potential beneficiary households expressed interest in sending their children to the centers. Moreover, they also reported high anticipated use of the centers, with respondents planning to send their children an average of 4.6 days/week.<sup>1</sup> These figures were similar across both PSNP and non-PSNP households, suggesting limited potential stigma in non-PSNP households around participating in a PSNP-affiliated program, which targets the most vulnerable and poor households, or having their children attend a childcare center run by PSNP participants.

FIGURE 2:  
DEMAND FOR CHILDCARE SERVICES AND EARNINGS EXPECTATIONS

Care givers who think they could earn greater income



Demand for child care services



**There is limited evidence of social norms against the use of childcare centers.** Social norms that stand against the use of childcare centers may discourage study participants from sending their children to the centers. To assess the prevalence of such norms, the participants were asked to what extent they believe women in their community would send their children to the centers. On average, eight out of ten women were thought to use the centers regardless of their PSNP status.

<sup>1</sup> The childcare centers were open for five days in a week.



**The expressed demand was followed by demonstrated demand with high use of the childcare centers.** While high demand is encouraging, it does not necessarily result in the use of childcare centers. To monitor the use of these childcare centers, administrative attendance data were collected. Three-quarters of the PSNP households selected to take part in this intervention attended the training for caregivers. Additionally, data from June 2021 shows that on a given day, 75 percent of the children attended the childcare centers. This shows that both attendance in childcare training, as well as enrollment and attendance in childcare centers, is high.

## NEXT STEPS

**The strong demand for and use of childcare centers found in the pilot can not only inform future efforts to reinstate and expand these services within the context of the Ethiopia PSNP, but also bolster the existing regional evidence establishing demand for childcare services in rural settings.** The implementation materials, organizational experience, and program evidence developed through the pilot will bolster the latest phase of the Ethiopia PSNP, which scales up its support to poor and vulnerable rural households and includes childcare services for participant households. The implementation materials, including the childcare center operational and training manuals, could be utilized in future efforts to deliver these childcare interventions within the PSNP and beyond, with appropriate adaptations. Similarly, implementing organizations with experience working in rural areas of Ethiopia remain available to deliver childcare services in these settings. Furthermore, while the strong demand and use of the childcare centers is encouraging, there remains a relative lack of evidence around the impact of childcare interventions on rural women's economic empowerment and child outcomes in Ethiopia: further testing to verify their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness should complement efforts to pilot and scale-up these services.

**More rigorous evidence is needed to understand the impacts of community-based rural childcare centers on child development and caregiver outcomes.** While these surveys provide a useful glimpse into the demand for and norms around external childcare in rural settings, they cannot tell the full story around the effects of these centers on cognitive, psychosocial, and health outcomes for children, as well as individual labor supply, time use, income, and empowerment for caregivers. An impact evaluation study could test whether the childcare centers affect these key outcomes, providing additional insights on the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and potential scalability of such interventions.

Photo credit: Binyam Teshome / World Bank, Child Fund

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