

Education for Protection and Well-being (EPW) Sierra Leone Qualitative Program Evaluation 2023

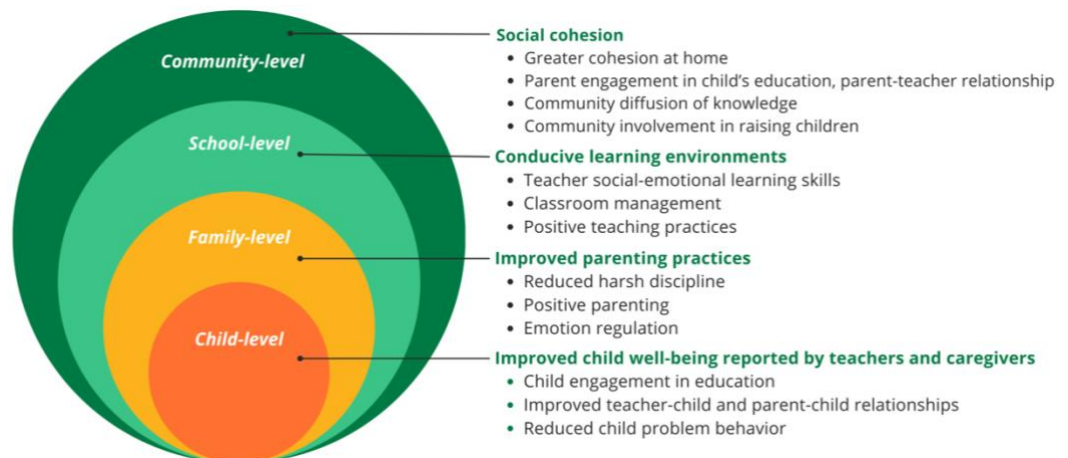


Executive Summary

Background: The Education for Protection and Wellbeing (EPW) model is a program that aims to strengthen child-adult relationships, reduce violence, and create conducive and nurturing school and home environments.

Methods: We conducted a qualitative evaluation among teachers (16) and caregivers (63) who participated in the EPW pilot in two schools in Northern Sierra Leone to understand their experience in the program, what they learned and have been practicing, and any changes they have noticed in their homes and schools since starting the program. **Findings:** Participants across all focus groups discussed similar topics and themes related to the community, school, family, and children. At the community level, participants reported greater **social cohesion**, with many participants reporting greater cohesion at home and in the community, greater parent engagement in their child's education, stronger relationships with their child's teacher, and community involvement in raising children. The school-level

theme that emerged was **teachers creating more conducive learning environments** through teacher social-emotional skills, classroom management, and positive teacher practices. The family-level theme that emerged was **improved parenting practices**, which include reduced harsh discipline, positive parenting skills, and parent emotion regulation. The child-level theme that emerged was **improved child well-being, as reported by caregivers and teachers**. Teachers and caregivers reported improved child engagement in education, improved relationships with children, and reduced child problem behavior.



Conclusions: Many caregivers and teachers reported that they, their children, and their families have benefited from participating in the EPW program. We found high levels of participant engagement in the focus groups despite high levels of adversity and competing priorities for participants, which may point to high levels of satisfaction with the EPW program. Most caregivers and teachers wanted the program to continue and that it should be made available to other students in their community and across Sierra Leone.

Education for Protection and Wellbeing

Research Brief

Overview of Model

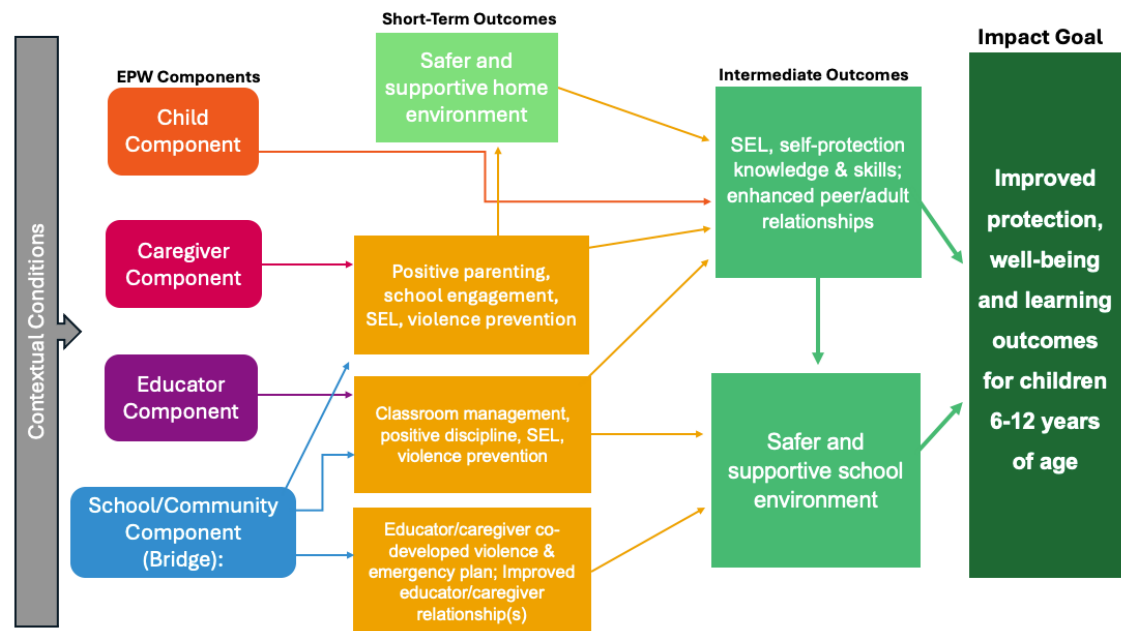
ChildFund’s Education for Protection and Wellbeing (EPW) Model targets children ages 6-12, their teachers, and their caregivers over two years in schools. The EPW model strongly emphasizes improving relationships within and between levels of the ecological model among children, caregivers, and teachers. The EPW components are described in Figure 1 and Table 1.

“If you take care of that butterfly child tomorrow, it will be a profit to you and an entire generation.”

- Teacher, semi-urban school

ChildFund started the pilot implementation of EPW in Sierra Leone from March 2022 to July 2023 in two communities in the Koinadugu district before expanding to other communities: the Yagala community in the Wara-Wara Yagala Chiefdom and the Bilimaia community in the Sengbeh Chiefdom. The Yagala community is a rural village predominantly comprised of people from the Limba ethnic group. In Yagala, agriculture and petty trading are the primary sources of livelihood. The Bilimaia is a semi-urban community comprising the Kuranko and Fullah ethnic groups. Bilimaia community members are engaged in small-scale farming and petty trading for their main sources of livelihood. The results of the qualitative focus groups from the EPW pilot are presented in this report.

Figure 1. The components, outcomes, and impact of the Education for Protection and Wellbeing Model



Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand what the teacher and caregiver participants learned from the EPW program, what new skills, if any, they are putting into practice, and any

changes they have observed with the children in their homes, classrooms, schools, and communities since participating in the program.

Methods

Focus group data collection took place in September 2023 with teachers and caregivers who completed the EPW program at Yagala Catholic Primary School and Alharkan Primary School in the Koinadugu district (see Table 1 in the Appendix). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before each focus group discussion started.

Data Analysis

A team of 6 researchers worked together to code and analyze the data and confirm the focus group themes. For a more in-depth description of the methods, please see the EPW 2023 Qualitative Evaluation Report.

Findings

Participant demographics

Characteristics of the caregivers (N=63) and teachers (N=16) from the 9 focus groups are presented in the Appendix in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Nearly three-quarters of male and female caregivers cared for multiple children (mean=5.5 children), and the majority (n=47; 74.6%) cared for non-biological children.

Focus group themes

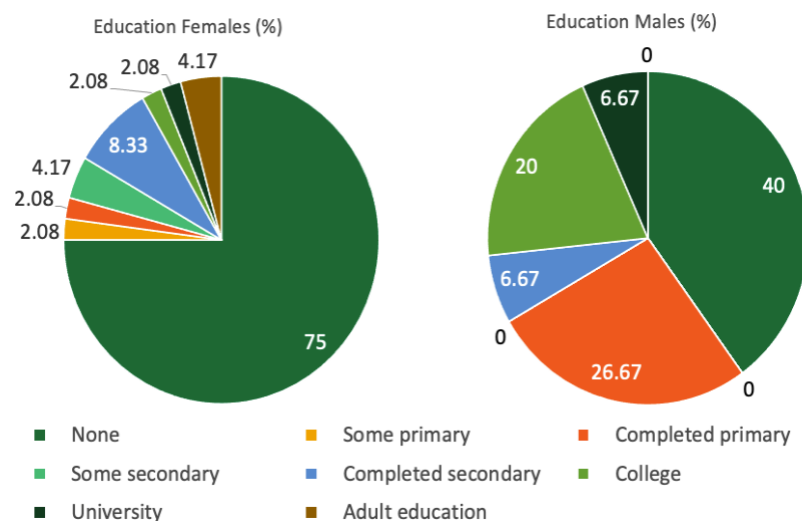
The teachers and caregivers in Sierra Leone reported personally benefitting from participating in the EPW program. Teachers and caregivers also reported noticing positive changes in their students and children, respectively, and among their family members since starting the program. Four main themes emerged from the focus groups: **1) social cohesion, 2) more conducive learning environments, 3) improved parenting practices, and 4) improved child well-being reported by teachers and caregivers** (See Figure 3 above). In the following sections, we describe these themes in more detail.

Theme 1: Social cohesion

The EPW program has fostered social cohesion among caregivers, teachers, and community members, enhancing community support for child development. Caregivers now often reported knowing their child's teacher by name and interacting with them regularly outside of bridge sessions. One male caregiver said:

The bridge sessions have actually helped me to have a good relationship with the teachers and to know most of the teachers... As a result of the bridge sessions, I

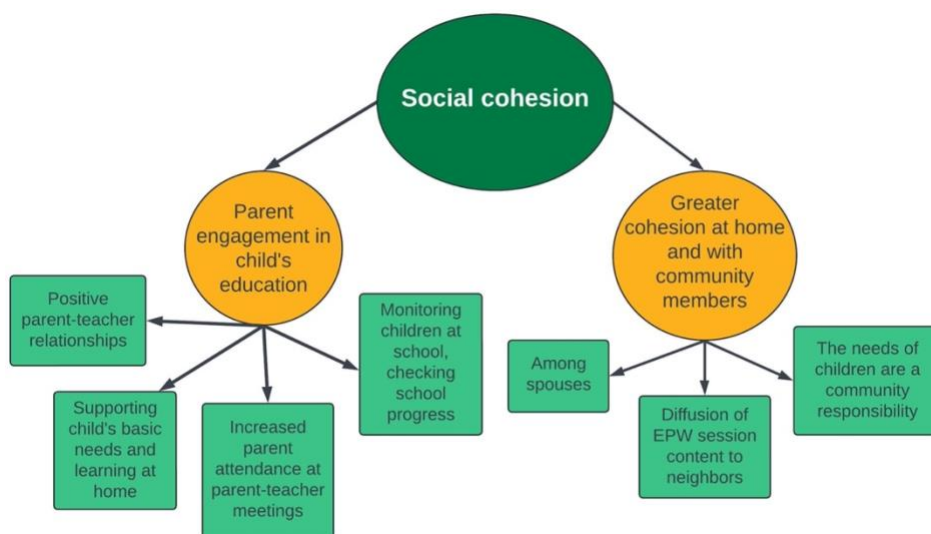
Figure 2. Caregiver focus group participant education levels



now know almost all the teachers that are in the school and we have a good relationship. Even when we meet along the streets, we now greet each other in a positive way. So, that has actually impacted my relationship with the teachers in the school.

– Male caregiver, semi-urban school

Figure 3. Theme 2: Social cohesion



Parent engagement in child's education.

Most caregivers, many of whom never had the opportunity to attend school, reported that they were now implementing new learnings about ways they can be more engaged in their child's education. Several caregivers who could not read reported now finding creative ways to help their children with their schoolwork in the evenings.

Since this program came... Now we've changed; we monitor the kids, the time they should be in school, and the time they should be at home. Now I check whether the teacher is giving notes [grades] or if the teacher is not giving notes, I check the notes of my kids to know what they are learning. If not for this program, I'm sure we would have continued to do this, sending our kids to school anyhow without checking their progress or their protection... Before this time, we would just send our kids to school; we didn't even know what happened with the students, and we didn't even know what happened in the school.

– Male caregiver, rural school

Despite many competing priorities, all caregivers and teachers noted that caregivers now prioritize attending parent-teacher meetings, which they reported was not the case before the EPW program.

Before this time when a teacher invited us to come to school to assemble, we would tell them, "No, we are going to the farm," and as a result, some of us were not attending the meetings. But since we started attending the meeting, it has been beneficial. The teachers will come and share their ideas, and we, the caregivers, will also share our ideas. It's been beneficial to



us as caregivers and also has been beneficial to the teachers and also helpful to the children.

– Female caregiver, > 45 years, rural school

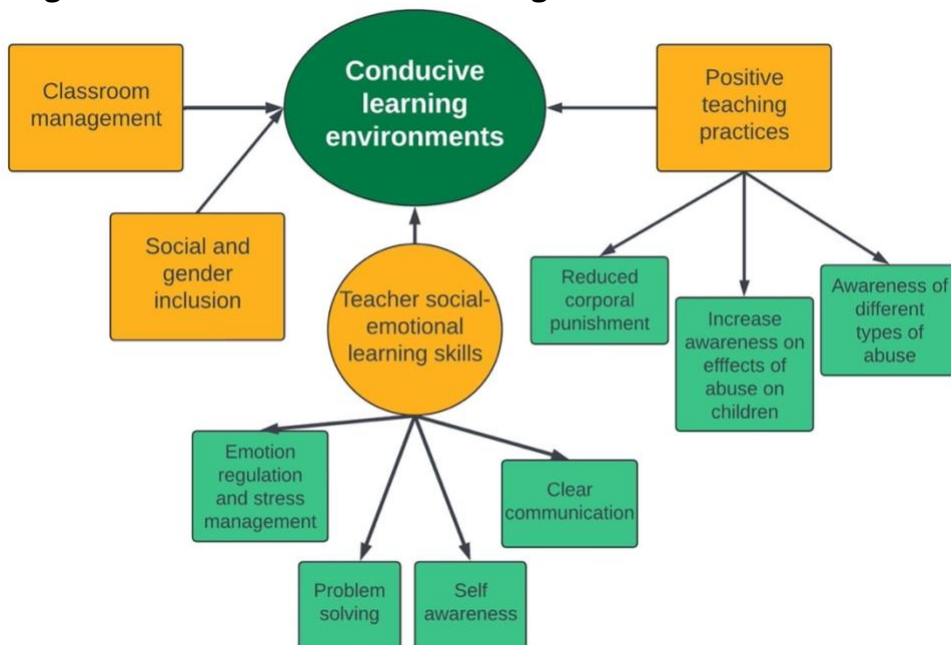
Cohesion at home and with community members. Several caregivers and teachers also reported having greater cohesion at home, with their spouses, and among community members since participating in the program. Several participants reported sharing information they learned in the EPW sessions with people living in their homes, neighbors, and community members.

Theme 2: Teachers created more conducive learning environments

Teachers reported using classroom and personal management strategies to create positive learning environments that better support student learning and social-emotional development (Figure 4).

Teacher social-emotional learning. Many teachers reported practicing the SEL skills that they learned in EPW. The most salient SEL skills reported by the teachers were self-awareness, stress management, and emotional regulation.

Figure 4. Theme 2: Conducive learning environments



Teachers reported that they often experience multiple stressors outside of work, such as economic and family problems. Before attending the program, the teachers reported that they would unknowingly bring their negative emotions from the stressors in their lives into the classroom. Through the program, the teachers reported growing in their awareness of stressors in their lives, how those stressors negatively affect themselves and their students, and strategies they can use to

manage and cope with the stressors more productively.

As a teacher, always we are surrounded by stressful situations. For me, sometimes, if I come to school, maybe I have family problems or economic problems, I bring that particular emotion to school. So [when] I get to class, I will not even greet my pupils... But since this particular model came [it] helped me to be aware that as a teacher, you need to manage your emotions, you need to have self-management skills... If you have a problem at home, try to sit down as a teacher and counsel yourself. When you counsel yourself, put yourself cool and calm and then you get to

class. By doing so, that will help to model the problems and the problem will not go to pupils and it will not affect the pupils.

- Male teacher, rural school

Classroom management. In addition to SEL skills, teachers reported implementing more interactive pedagogy and structured classroom management (e.g., child-centered teaching and intentional seating arrangements). Before EPW, many teachers said that the teacher was “considered the master,” and the students would be expected to sit quietly and be “passive learners,” leading them to be disengaged. Since completing the program, many teachers reported having more interaction with their students in class, including greeting the children when they enter the class and involving the students more in the learning by asking them questions, allowing students to ask questions, and asking students to share their experiences and what they’re learning with the class.

Positive teaching practices. Many teachers also reported increased awareness about the different types of abuse (emotional, physical/corporal punishment) and the negative effects that these have on children, their learning, and their engagement in school.

Through these projects, I learn about different types of abuse. [Before the program,] we were abusing these children unknowingly to us, by touching them in the bad way, even the way of talking to them, you abused them, the way we punished them, we abused them.

- Male teacher, semi-urban school

One teacher reported that using corporal punishment was seen as a tradition. Since starting the EPW program, many teachers have reported no longer using corporal punishment in their classrooms. Several teachers reported more positive relationships with their students due to reduced corporal and emotional punishment in the classroom.



We have taken all the canes and burned them. Only a paper pointer is what one that we are using, and we try to put a face on them for pointing. So the children now can come very close to us... Before this they [the children] said, “Why are you calling that mister [the teacher], leave him alone you don't want to be flogged.” But now there's a very cordial relationship between us... Some of [the students'] parents also do not want their child to be beaten but it has become a tradition before this.... Before this time, we did not know it, but now we are also having confidence and peace of mind that even these children learn tomorrow they could benefit us if they are not being given corporal punishment.

- Male teacher, semi-urban school

Social and gender inclusion. Teachers also noted changes in social and gender inclusion, specifically how they treat girls and children with disabilities. Teachers in both schools reported that how they now manage their classrooms encourages girls to see themselves as

equal to boys, whereas before, the boys saw themselves as superior to the girls. In previous years, the teachers at both schools reported that the boys typically had better grades than the girls, but since EPW was implemented, teachers have noticed positive changes in the learning of their female students, reducing the gender inequalities in their schools. One teacher noted:

The last academic year the results that were issued by the teachers, it was the girls that performed better than the boys. This program made them see themselves as one, both the boys and the girls, so now the girls challenge the boys.

- Male teacher, rural school

Overall, teachers noted substantive changes in their classrooms as a result of the EPW strategies. One male teacher said,

In the past, the way we used to teach compared to this one now, as you have given us, is far different. It's like life and death.

- Male teacher, semi-urban school

Theme 3: Improved positive parenting practices

Caregivers reported using improved positive parenting practices (Figure 5), which, they thought, led to enhanced parent-child relationships and more nurturing home environments.

Clear communication and expectations.

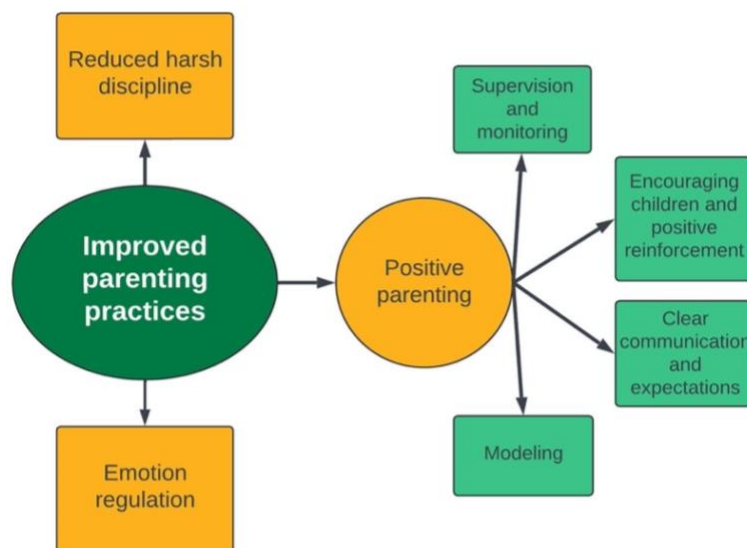
Before attending EPW, several caregivers reported using unclear communication with their children, and many noted frustrations because their children did not do what they thought they had asked. Regarding clear communication, several

caregivers reported now setting clear expectations and giving specific instructions to their children when they asked them to participate in household chores. Many caregivers reported that this new communication strategy led to the child doing what the caregiver wanted of them more often.

Encouraging children and positive reinforcement. Some caregivers reported encouraging their children more since attending the program and using positive reinforcement when their child does something they like or ask them to do.

Supervision and monitoring. Many caregivers reported now monitoring their children to ensure they attended school, returned home after school, completed their schoolwork in the evenings, and did not get involved in the wrong peer groups that could negatively influence them.

Figure 5. Theme 3: Improved parenting practices



And we've been taught that it's very important to monitor our kids. For me, I'll make sure as much as every day to ensure the child comes to school, I'll follow up and come to confirm where the child is in school. And when I see her in class, then I'll know she's in school. Notwithstanding, I also make sure I follow up at the end of the day on what is being taught in school. So when the child is at home, I also have a responsibility to look after her... At seven, normally, I will tell her to take her book to study, and she will study until, at some point, she can stop.

- Male caregiver, semi-urban school

Reduced corporal punishment and emotional abuse. Similar to the teachers, many caregivers reported learning that emotional abuse (e.g., yelling at children, threatening them) and corporal punishment harm children and can contribute to negative outcomes. With this new learning, many caregivers reported engaging less often in emotional abuse and corporal punishment since participating in EPW.

Also, I was used to flogging the children at home. I used violence with the cane - we have those canes all over the country. Whenever the child did something that was not good, I used the cane. But since this program came, even the canes that were there at home, I threw them away because I've seen that flogging the child will not solve the problem. The child needs encouragement, sit with the child. They also have their own issues, allow them to say something, you know, let them express themselves as well.

- Male caregiver, rural school

Emotional regulation. The most salient SEL skills that caregivers reported were self-awareness and emotional regulation. Caregivers reported that they are now more aware of what situations triggered them and how to manage their unpleasant emotions and stress in productive ways, which helps them to respond to their children more positively. For example, one female caregiver said,

One of the things that I learned is how to manage emotions. I am somebody who likes shouting, like yelling at children. And that wasn't helpful at all. Even in terms of giving instructions at home, I shouted at my children. But since I started attending this program, I've been taught it is very important to talk to the child in a positive and calm manner. And that is what I've been doing. Even with their siblings at home. Now, my child has older siblings. What I do now, I even talk to the older siblings, [and tell them,] "It is very important for you to bring close the younger ones and even support them to study by that way, you also help them with their education." I was actually somebody who liked shouting, but now I no longer shout at them and no longer yell at them; this is something I learned.

- Female caregiver > 45 years, semi-urban school

Theme 4. Improved child well-being, reported by teachers and caregivers

Teachers and caregivers from all focus groups reported seeing positive changes in their children due to the EPW strategies they were starting to implement (Figure 6).

Child engagement in education.

Many teachers and caregivers reported observing that their children are now more engaged in school. Many caregivers reported having to “urge their children,” “chase their children,” or

use harsh discipline methods to force them to go to school or do their schoolwork at home before attending the EPW sessions. One male caregiver said,

Before this time, for kids to come to school, you had to chase them with a cane. And for some, even when they leave home to school, on their way to school, they will just stop in between; they would not reach the school because their parents were not also following up. Some would not come to school, and along the road, they would also get involved in some things that are not good. You would only get to know this when you receive complaints that your child was not in school and was involved in this hubbub. But now, we really appreciate it; all of them now come to school, and we, the parents, we're also following up, so as a result of that, we really see their punctuality to come to school.

- Male caregiver, semi-urban school

Lastly, teachers reported that the children’s school attendance is now more regular. They attributed the change in attendance to the reduced use of corporal punishment in the classroom and the positive relationships they are building with them.

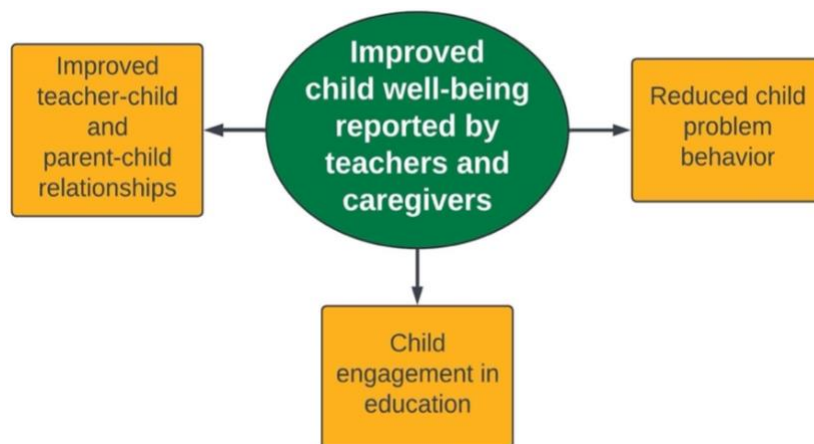
They come to school every day there is regularity. Before this, they were not regular in school. We didn't know they were afraid of this cane. But since those things are being put aside this year... they have loved the school more than ourselves.

- Male teacher, semi-urban school

Positive teacher-child and parent-child relationships. As noted in some of the quotes above, several caregivers and teachers reported more positive relationships with their children and students.

Teachers reported observing changes in the children since starting the EPW program, including children wanting to come closer to the teachers, sharing challenges they face with them, asking teachers for their support in navigating specific challenges, and even playing with the teacher during unstructured breaks during the school day.

Figure 6. Theme 4: Improved child well-being



As I've been observing the children, before this, they could hardly come closer to me. But now, through sharing with them, they will discuss with me what their problems are... before, I never knew [their problems]... but now we're sharing with them, talking with them, having a good relationship with them. I can know what [the challenges that the] children [have] at home and on the way to school and in school also. I have really learned that there is a great impact, there's a change.

- Male teacher, semi-urban school

When asked why they thought their children were coming closer to them, many caregivers and teachers attributed this change in relationship to positive parenting and positive teaching practices, encouraging their children and students, reductions in harsh discipline strategies, and greater engagement in the child's life.

Reduced child problem behavior. Caregivers reported less frequent child problem behavior due to reduced corporal punishment and increased use of positive parenting strategies. Many caregivers described that their children are now “less stubborn” and more willing to listen to them and help with chores around the house. A few caregivers reported that this shift in the children's behavior and parent-child relationship has created more peace in the home.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the teachers and caregivers in Sierra Leone reported personally benefitting from participating in the EPW program. They also reported noticing positive changes in their students and children, respectively, and among their family members. Notably, in every focus group, teachers and caregivers offered that they thought the EPW program should be available to students in other grades and other schools in their community and communities across Sierra Leone.



Thanks we pray that This program will continue in our schools and to be extended to other schools, because it is really, really important, it is really timely for us to have these kinds of projects in our schools because, if the parents don't have that required knowledge or that required awareness, to help their children, it will be a very, very difficult task for the schools to really, really turn around the development of the children.

- Male teacher, rural school

Appendix

Table 1. Focus group (N=9) characteristics conducted with primary school teachers (N=16) and caregivers (N=63)

Focus group characteristics ^a	Semi-urban school (n = 4 focus groups)		Rural school (n = 5 focus groups)	
	# of Focus groups	# of Participants	# of Focus groups	# of Participants
Teacher focus groups	1	9	1	7
Male caregiver focus groups	1	5	1	10
Female caregiver focus groups				
≤ 25 years	0	0	1	5
26-44 years	1	12	1	10
≥ 45 years	1	10	1	11

Note.

^a There was a greater proportion of female caregivers who participated in the EPW pilot. As such, we held more female caregiver focus groups, separated by age to help encourage open discussion.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of caregiver focus group participants from the two communities (one rural and one semi-urban) in Northern Sierra Leone (N=63)

Characteristic	Females (n = 48)	Males (n = 15)
Main source(s) of livelihood (n [%]) ^a		
Farming	29 (60.42%)	13 (86.67%)
Trading	23 (47.92%)	2 (13.33%)
Business	8 (16.67%)	0 (0.00%)
Other ^b	3 (6.24%)	3 (6.24%)
Number of children in their care (Mean [range])	5.44 (range = 2 to 11)	5.73 (range = 1 to 11)
Number of non-biological children in their care (Mean [range])	2.02 (range = 0 to 6)	1.27 (range = 0 to 4)

Note. n=number. Mean=average

^a Participants could select more than one livelihood, so the total N for this item exceeds the total number of male and female participants

^b Other livelihood categories include teaching, babysitting, construction, panel beating, teaching, NGO.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of teacher focus group participants from the two communities (one rural and one semi-urban) in Northern Sierra Leone

Characteristic	Semi-urban school (n = 9)	Rural school (n = 7)
Age (mean [range])	35.89 (range = 23 to 56)	35.14 (range = 26 to 54)
Sex (n [%])	5 (55.56%)	7 (100%)
Male	4 (44.44%)	0 (0.0%)
Female		
Years of teaching experience (mean [range])	9.67 (range = 2-23)	10.86 (range = 3-30)
Other jobs to support their livelihood (n [%]) ^a	2 (22.22%)	7 (100%)
Farming	1 (11.11%)	0 (0.00%)
Trading		
How many of their own children do they have? (Mean [range])	2.67 (range = 0 to 6)	2.86 (range = 0 to 6)
Highest level of education (n [%])		
College	9 (100%)	4 (57.41%)
University	0 (0.00%)	3 (42.86%)

Note. n=number. Mean=average

^a Indicates jobs other than teaching

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