

ECD NEWSLETTER

April 2026

Published by
BEN Secretariat



Bangladesh
ECD Network (BEN)

www.ben-ecd.net

Table of Content

03

Roundtable highlights urgent need to strengthen ECD implementation in Bangladesh.

04

Creating Joyful and Child-Friendly Early Learning Environments

05

Together for Children: A Story of Community Parenting in Bhola

07

The BRAC and LEGO Foundation Partnership for Learning Through Play

08

Compassion International Bangladesh (CIB)

10

Bringing Joyful Beginnings: DASCOH Strengthens Early Learning in Barind Communities

11

Early Childhood Development Highlights from Save the Children

12

Shoishob: Learning Through Play with STEAM

13

We need education reforms that actually work

16

Research Report on Mental Health of Working Mothers

Roundtable highlights urgent need to strengthen ECD implementation in Bangladesh



On 6 April 2026, a roundtable organised by Prothom Alo in collaboration with the Thrive Programme of Oxford Policy Management underscored the urgent need to strengthen the implementation of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Bangladesh. Bringing together policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners, the discussion focused on bridging the gap between strong policy commitments and on-the-ground realities.

Speakers acknowledged that Bangladesh has a robust policy foundation for ECD, including the Comprehensive ECCD Policy 2013, involving multiple ministries. However, significant implementation challenges persist, particularly in cross-ministerial coordination, fragmentation across service delivery platforms, human resource capacity at the local level, quality assurance, and financing. These gaps continue to limit the reach and effectiveness of ECD services, especially for disadvantaged children and families.

Participants emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to child development, encompassing health, nutrition, early learning, protection, and responsive caregiving, beginning from pregnancy. The first 1,000 days of life were highlighted as the

“golden period,” a critical window for long-term cognitive and physical development.

The roundtable called for a shift from fragmented, project-based initiatives to a coordinated, government-led national programme that better aligns existing service delivery platforms, supported by a dedicated financing framework. The establishment of a Child Affairs Directorate was proposed to strengthen leadership, accountability, and cross-sectoral coordination.

Experts further highlighted the need for increased investment, improved service quality, and stronger monitoring systems. Expanding access to services for vulnerable populations, scaling up proven interventions, and enhancing parental awareness were identified as key priorities. Persistent inequities were noted, with children from poorer households facing reduced access to services.

The discussion concluded with a strong call for sustained multi-sectoral collaboration to position ECD as a national development priority, recognising its long-term contribution to human capital development and inclusive growth.

[Photo and Content Source: <https://www.prothomalo.com/roundtable/x9rthk1fqj>]

Creating Joyful and Child-Friendly Early Learning Environments



Anandalok Trust promotes quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) by creating safe, joyful, and child-friendly learning environments in its Pre-Primary class of both Formal and Anandalok Schools.

One of the key strengths of Pre-Primary class is the attractive and engaging classroom setup. During the reporting period, classrooms are decorated with playing materials such as blocks, dolls, number and letter cards, and colorful wall paintings. These materials support play-based learning, allowing children to learn through exploration, interaction, and creativity. This helps improve children's attention, participation, and early learning skills.

A special focus is given to welcoming new students and ensuring a smooth transition into school. Schools arrange a warm reception for newly enrolled children, where teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) members, parents and existing students take part. Children are welcomed with flowers, garlands, songs, and joyful activities, creating a festival-like environment.

This approach supports children's emotional well-being and school readiness. It helps them feel safe, valued, and confident from their first day. As a result, children adjust more easily to the school environment, attend regularly, and actively participate in learning.

Through these simple but effective practices, Anandalok Trust is helping children develop a positive attitude towards learning from an early age.

Together for Children: A Story of Community Parenting in Bhola

*AVAS Sponsorship Funded Programme
Plan International Bangladesh*

From January to March 2026, the Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS), under the Sponsorship Funded Programme in partnership with Plan International Bangladesh, implemented two key parenting activities in Bhola Sadar Upazila the Grandparents Club and the Father's Café. These activities were conducted across 07 unions, reaching families of children aged 0-5 years.

Grandparents Club

The Grandparents Club brought together grandmothers and grandfathers - often the primary caregivers of young children in a supportive group setting. The sessions were held across 07 unions with a total of 822 grandparents participating. Facilitators discussed the importance of responsive caregiving, the impact of positive communication on child development, and how traditional practices can be adapted to better support young children's growth. Many participants shared that the sessions gave them a new perspective. One of the grandmother Sahida Begum noted, "I did not know that singing and storytelling with my grandchild is so important for their brain. Now I do it every day."



*Grandparents participating in a club session
Bheduria Union, Bhola Sadar, Jan 26*

Father's Café

The Father's Café created an informal and welcoming space for fathers to open up about their role in their children's lives. Held on the different date of January across 7 union, the sessions brought together fathers for open discussion on active fatherhood, emotional support for mothers, and the importance of spending quality time with young children. One father Rafiqul Islam reflected, "I used to think childcare was not my responsibility. Now I understand that my involvement matters for my child and for my family."

These activities reflect AVAS's commitment to engaging the entire family in early childhood development. When grandparents and fathers take an active role, children thrive. AVAS continues to work towards a community where every child receives the love, care, and support they deserve.



*Fathers engaged in a café-style discussion,
Shibpur Union, Bhola Sadar, Jan 2026*

The BRAC and LEGO Foundation Partnership for Learning Through Play

Building on more than a decade of collaboration, BRAC and the LEGO Foundation are advancing a \$50 million partnership to help children affected by crisis learn, heal, and thrive through play. In Bangladesh, this commitment is delivered through Sustaining Play, Learning and Skills in Humanitarian Contexts (SPLASH), a programme designed to adapt to the evolving needs of displaced children and their caregivers.

SPLASH follows a life-cycle approach from birth to 18. It begins with responsive caregiving (0–3) in camp and host communities, supporting early stimulation and caregiver wellbeing. For children aged 3–5 in the camps, Humanitarian Play Labs (HPLs) provide inclusive, play-based early learning spaces. For children aged 5–9, the programme supports a smoother transition into early primary years by strengthening child-centred teaching and foundational learning through play. In host communities, play-based approaches are integrated within schools and madrasahs to improve early learning experiences. For adolescents (10–18), SPLASH expands learning opportunities and builds life skills and future readiness, alongside caregiver engagement and mental health support. Across all stages, services are designed for all children, including children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), ensuring inclusion and dignity in crisis settings. Together, the partnership aims to ensure that crisis-affected children and adolescents in Bangladesh can grow, learn, and thrive with dignity, while generating evidence to sustain and scale impact beyond the programme period.



Compassion International Bangladesh (CIB): Releasing Children from Poverty

Compassion International Bangladesh (CIB) has been working since 2008 with the mission of releasing children from poverty. In partnership with 19 local partner organizations, CIB implements 193 community based projects across Bangladesh, serving more than 57000 children and youth aged 0–22 years, along with their families.

Through a child centered and family focused approach, CIB promotes the holistic development of children and young people—physically, emotionally, socially, and on character transformation. Our integrated programs address the root causes of poverty through interventions in health and nutrition, survival & early childhood development, education, youth development, livelihood strengthening, child protection, and character transformation, helping families and communities build resilient and sustainable futures.

Survival and Early Childhood Program

Healthy beginnings for Mothers and Young Children

The Survival and Early Childhood Program focuses on mother and children from the day of conception to early childhood (0 to 1 year), supporting underprivileged pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children during the most critical stages of life. Implemented through local partners, the program delivers timely, family centered support to improve survival, growth, and development outcomes. Currently we are serving more than 1500 mother and child through CSP (Child Survival Program) program at 101 Local Development Centers and also expecting addition of 78 CSP program in Fiscal Year 2027.

Guided by the Nurturing Care Framework, the program integrates:

Maternal,
newborn, and
child health
care

Improved
nutrition

Child
protection
and safety

Early
stimulation
and learning

Responsive
caregiving

Positive
values and
character
formation

Key interventions include promoting antenatal and postnatal care, encouraging skilled birth attendance, and improving maternal and child nutrition, including a complementary feeding program for pregnant and lactating mothers. Families also receive counseling and awareness sessions on breastfeeding, immunization, hygiene, family planning, positive parenting, and early learning.

Together with our local partners, Compassion International Bangladesh supports children from birth through young adulthood (0–22 years), helping them survive, grow, and thrive—breaking the cycle of poverty for generations to come.



Children Learning Through Play-An Early Stimulation Program



Complementary Feeding Program for Mothers

Bringing Joyful Beginnings: DASCOH Strengthens Early Learning in Barind Communities

DASCOH Foundation, an active member of the Bangladesh ECD Network and CAMPE, continues to advance inclusive early childhood education through its “Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education (PRIORITY)” project, with support from NETZ Partnership for Development and Justice, in the drought-prone Barind region of Rajshahi District.

From January to March 2026, DASCOH strengthened pre-primary education in 30 government primary schools across Godagari and Tanore Upazilas, where many Indigenous communities, including Santal, Oraon, Mahali, and Munda, reside. The initiative focuses on preparing five-year-old children for primary school through holistic development.



A well-decorated, child-friendly classroom where children actively participate in joyful learning sessions with their teacher.

DASCOH supported the establishment of child-friendly pre-primary classrooms and trained 30 teachers to deliver sessions aligned with the national curriculum using play-based and participatory methods. Children engaged in storytelling, rhymes, drawing, games, and basic literacy and numeracy activities, fostering curiosity, confidence, and social skills. Life skills such as communication, hygiene, and mutual respect were also emphasised.

With active involvement from School Management Committees (SMCs), 30 classrooms were renovated and enriched with learning materials, creating welcoming and inclusive learning environments. The initiative ensured equal participation of girls and boys and prioritised children from marginalised and remote communities.

A key achievement of this intervention is the successful enrollment of all eligible children from Indigenous communities in the targeted areas, many of whom previously lacked access to early learning opportunities. As a result, 842 children now regularly attend pre-primary sessions, with no reported dropouts, demonstrating improved classroom participation and peer interaction.

This initiative has also strengthened community awareness, encouraging parents to prioritise early education and support their children’s learning journey.

Early Childhood Development Highlights from Save the Children

Save the Children continues to strengthen early childhood development (ECD) initiatives across Bangladesh through innovative, community driven, and partnership based approaches that ensure young children are ready to learn, thrive, and succeed.

In Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, the **Education in Emergency (EiE) project** supported host community children to transition successfully into formal education. Early childhood care and development (ECCD) centers operated in three daily shifts using play based learning, storytelling, and group activities to promote social emotional development, early literacy, and numeracy. As a result, 123 children transitioned into government primary schools and Madrashas at age five, while 270 new learners were enrolled, expanding access to quality early learning.

The **“Cholo Shikhi Khelar Chholey” project** demonstrated how private sector collaboration can transform ECCD delivery. Supported by PVH Corporate, the project worked in 25 factory linked communities, where garment factories operated daycare and early-learning centers, with technical support from Save the Children. This shared ownership model has been recognized by a World Bank assessment for its quality and cost effectiveness. A national sharing workshop in January 2026 highlighted joyful learning, strong public private partnerships, and factory investment in ECCD.

In urban slums, the **Shishuder Jonno program** empowered communities to sustain 4+ pre primary education even after program exit. Parents, slum management committees (SMCs), and volunteers jointly selected unreached children, provided learning spaces, monitored activities, and shared costs. What started as six pilot centers has expanded to 60 community led

centers, currently serving around 600 children.

To support children of garment workers, the **Aparajita and MANGO projects** established community based, inclusive daycare centers in Savar, Mirpur, and Gazipur. These centers provided ECCD services to 615 children, trained 1,035 parents in positive parenting, and strengthened the capacity of 40 caregivers, enabling working mothers to participate in the workforce with confidence.

Together, these initiatives reflect Save the Children's commitment to inclusive and high quality early childhood development across Bangladesh.



Shoishob: Learning Through Play with STEAM



Shoishob is an early childhood education initiative that focuses on play-based learning using a STEAM approach (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). Our goal is to help young children learn through hands-on activities, curiosity, and exploration.

One of our engaging activities is called “Paper Boat Challenge.” In this activity, children make boats using different types of paper such as newspaper, colored paper, and cardboard. After making their boats, they place them in water and observe what happens.

The children are encouraged to predict which boat will float longer and which one will sink first. As they test their boats, they carefully watch, compare, and share their ideas. This simple activity helps children understand basic scientific concepts like floating and sinking. It also introduces early engineering thinking.

Through this activity, children develop important skills such as problem-solving, observation, creativity, and communication. They also learn to ask questions, test their ideas, and learn from their observations in a fun and supportive environment.

Shoishob believes that learning should be joyful and meaningful. Activities like the Paper Boat Challenge help children build a strong foundation for future learning while enjoying the process.

www.shoishob.xyz

The following article is taken from The Daily Star, dated 15 March 2026.

Link: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/we-need-education-reforms-actually-work-4128776>

We need education reforms that actually work

Manzoor Ahmed



'Why does the miserably poor quality of instruction in mainstream school education—excepting the elite high-cost English medium schools and the selective Bangla medium ones—persist in Bangladesh and much of South Asia?' FILE VISUAL: Rehnuma Proshoon

People's expectations about real reform in education have been raised by the busy round of meetings and expression of resolve seen in Minister of Education Dr Ehsanul Haque Milon and State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Bobby Hajjaj. The ministers announced a 12-point initial agenda for action, reflecting some of the election promises of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). They have also spoken about controlling rampant corruption in education, bringing students back to the classroom (from coaching centres), and schooling that prepares young people for the world of work. Each individual objective sounds reasonable and justifiable, but discrete action on each would make for fragmented and partial steps. It may end up being a false remedy for a symptom of a disease rather than for the disease itself.

For example, the near-universal practice of private coaching and tutoring is villainised for making students memorise guidebooks instead of studying textbooks, burdening parents with huge costs, and keeping students away from classrooms. The solution prescribed is to ban or severely restrict private coaching and tutoring. This remedy ignores the fact that coaching centres are the symptoms—the disease is that teaching and learning do not happen in the classroom. Students do not see a good reason to be in the classroom. They feel compelled to rely on coaching to prepare for their exams. Restrictions

and bans on coaching have proved difficult to enforce because both suppliers and customers believe it is needed.

A multifaceted, multi-layered, and holistic approach is necessary to find a workable solution for the problem. Key issues have to be simultaneously addressed related to teachers' preparation and performance, school and classroom management, learning content preparation, learning assessment and exams, and teachers'/schools' interactions with students and parents. The solution has to work for each school and classroom and be supported by the administrative superstructure extending from the ministry, directorate, education boards, curriculum board, teachers' training colleges, and field-level administration. Why does the miserably poor quality of instruction in mainstream school education—excepting the elite high-cost English medium schools and the selective Bangla medium ones—persist in Bangladesh and much of South Asia? Despite many development projects with international assistance carried out over the last four or five decades, studies point to a critical failure: the power dynamics of policymaking and decision-making by politicians and administrators who fail to prioritise inclusive and equitable education of acceptable quality for all children.

A further probe into the non-action or misguided action of decision-makers suggests a common deficiency, which is the fragmented, partial, incoherent, and non-holistic response to problems. This highlights the absence of a systems approach which is a scientific method for designing, implementing, and evaluating teaching-learning as an integrated whole. The aim is to optimise educational outcomes by analysing and working on interconnected components—inputs (students, teachers, infrastructure), processes (instructional methods, assessment of learning, management of teachers), and outputs (student performance and learning outcomes). Feedback loops allow for corrections in the system. This systems approach ensures goal-oriented, efficient, and learner-centric instruction that produces the learning outcomes.

Political neglect and system incoherence are evident in the non-action and wrong actions following the adoption of the 2010 National Education Policy. Instead of a systematic effort and coordinated work plan to implement the policy, development projects and activities were undertaken in a fragmented manner for sub-sectors without an integrated view or time-bound goals regarding quality, equity, and inclusion in education. The lack of political vision and leadership has been filled by bureaucrats in the two ministries by default. The bureaucrats by their nature are inclined to protect the status quo. This double failure has landed us in today's education debacle. Can repetition be avoided? Some early signs are not that promising.

Observers have been arguing that school education—pre-primary to pre-university—should be put under one ministerial jurisdiction. Thereby, an integrated plan for quality, universal school education can be planned and implemented to meet the demand for basic competencies in our youth. It seemed this logic had won when a minister and a state minister were appointed for the whole education sector. But now the tasks have been redistributed, and the state minister has been placed in charge of the old Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. Is this a retreat to the old order and a vindication of Parkinson's law (which, in essence, says that work and staff keep expanding in a bureaucracy)?

Another problematic move concerns scholarship examinations. High-stakes public examinations after Class 5 and Class 8, respectively, have been discontinued. But there is a lobby to retain the scholarship examinations at these levels based on the argument that it is an inducement for better student performance. This may be so for those who are already good performers in a class, as only these 10-20 percent students are sent for the scholarship exams. But teachers' time and effort are diverted to these students at the cost of the remaining 80 percent of pupils who need more help from the teachers. Regular classes are halted in schools where the scholarship exams are held. Well-heeled parents of scholarship examinees support these exams; they are usually more educated, better-off, and more vocal than the

parents of the disadvantaged majority. These are instances of a bureaucratic mindset that has prevailed while sacrificing the best interests of children and education. A holistic systems thinking approach has been absent. The highly centralised management structure and the personnel there, mired in the routine tasks of regulating and controlling a large system from the capital, are not equipped in terms of training or temperament to work out and implement a major educational reform agenda.

Two consultative committees on primary and non-formal education and secondary education, respectively, were appointed by the interim government. Based on research, field visits, and stakeholder consultation, the reports of the two committees presented a critical review of school education in the country and recommendations for reform, indicating necessary short-, medium-, and long-term actions. Both reports examined the causes of past reform failures and suggested essential steps for an effective new initiative. But it is clear that reforms are not likely to take place if the task is left to the current administrative apparatus and actors as an additional duty. The reports proposed that a high-level task force should be appointed to take education reforms forward. Other subsectors of education—such as higher education, vocational-technical education, madrasa education, higher professional and technology education—also deserve to have their respective task forces. Joint strategies for preparing young children for school are needed from the ministries of education and women and children affairs.

At the same time, a comprehensive five-year education sector plan and a ten-year perspective plan need to be developed, guided by a dedicated education development council. The sector plan should combine and integrate the various sub-sector plans prepared by respective task forces. The task forces and the council may be transformed eventually into a permanent statutory education commission. These are the necessary next steps for launching an education reform effort that may have a better chance to succeed.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at BRAC University. He was the convener of the consultation committee on primary and non-formal education appointed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, as well as of the consultation committee on secondary education appointed by the Ministry of Education. Views expressed are his own.

Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

Research Report on

Mental Health of Working Mothers Tea Industries and Impacts on Children's Well-Being: A Mixed- Method Study

November 2025

**Accessing Learning Opportunities to the Young, Adolescent and
Livelihood Options for Women (ALOY-ALOW 2)**

Background

The current study is an initiative under the ALOY-ALOW project, which supports tea gardens and the Haor community in Moulvibazar District, Bangladesh. The study was conducted with co-funding from Child Fund Korea (CFK) and Educo Bangladesh, with operational and administrative support from IDEA (Institute of Development Affairs), aiming to understand the mental health of working mothers and its impact on children's well-being. In Bangladesh, women working in tea gardens face numerous challenges due to the systemic and organizational structure of the community. Additionally, maternal mental health is linked to socioeconomic deprivation and child development outcomes. That's why examining the mental health of working mothers and its impact on their children's well-being is important for improving the quality of life for both mothers and children in the tea garden community.

Study objectives

1. To assess the mental health status of working mothers in tea garden communities and its impact on the well-being of children.
2. To identify protective and risk factors contributing to the mental health of working mothers in the tea garden communities.

Methodology

A mixed-method study, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was conducted. Using a simple random sampling technique, data were collected from Rajghat, Patrokhola, Horincherra and Shidurkhan tea gardens at Moulvibazar, Bangladesh, from 15 to 30 October 2025. In the quantitative phase, data from 451 working mothers with at least one child between the ages of 2 to 7 years were collected. In the qualitative phase, using a purposive sampling technique, 11 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with community stakeholders, such as school teachers, religious leaders, local leaders, healthcare workers, tea garden managers, and working mothers, and 2 focus group discussions (FGD) with 10 to 11 working mothers were conducted.



Study Findings

Psychological well-being assessment of working mothers in tea gardens:

About 5.8%, 20.6%, and 16.4% working mothers have high levels of depression, anxiety and stress, respectively. Additionally, 32.4%, 29.9% and 31.9% working mothers are vulnerable to developing high-level depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively. In terms of psychological well-being, 33.9% working mothers have poor well-being, and an astonishing 41% working mothers are vulnerable to poor psychological well-being.

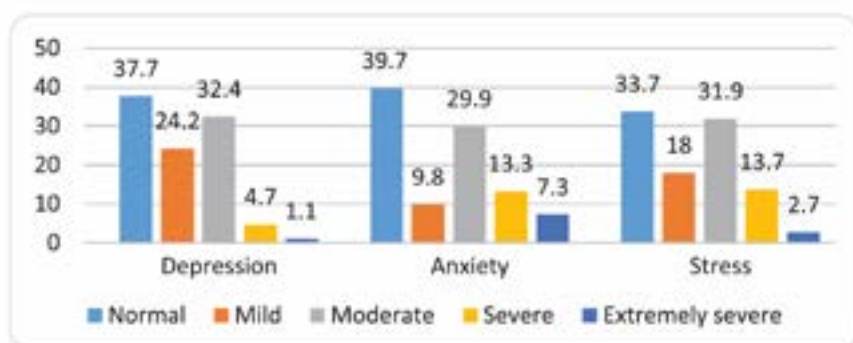


Figure 1: Psychological distress of mothers working in the tea garden in Moulvibazar

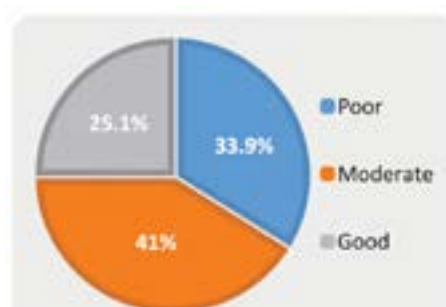


Figure 2: Psychological well-being of mothers working in the tea garden in Moulvibazar

Factors influencing the poor psychological well-being of mothers

The study showed that depression, anxiety, and stress levels are high among married women, women working as leaf pickers, and women who leave their children at home during work. Additionally, financial constraints are also a significant barrier to the well-being of working mothers.

Impact of mother's mental health on children's well-being

According to the mothers' reporting on their child's psychological factors, the majority (49.1%) of the children face a high level of difficulties across the behavioral, emotional, and social constructs. The children with mothers with depression and anxiety have a greater difficulty mean compared to children whose mothers do not have depression and anxiety.

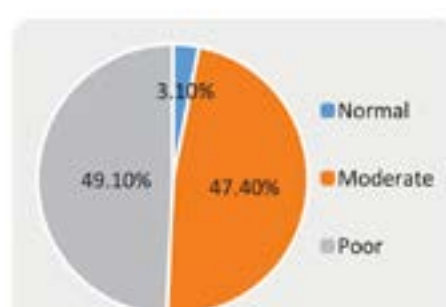


Figure 3: Strengths and difficulties of children of mothers working in the tea gardens



Risk And Protective Factors

Risk factors impacting the mental health of the mothers

Interviews with key stakeholders and the mothers working in the tea gardens helped to identify various factors impacting the mental health of mothers, such as exhaustive workload, harsh working environment, lack of domestic support, and concern for childcare. In the tea garden community, the mothers have to work in tea gardens, in harsh conditions with no shelter, water facilities, or toilets, while constantly worrying about their children's well-being.

Protective factors for the mental health of mothers

The study's findings also identified the community support, garden management, panchayet, government, and NGOs as protective factors for the well-being of these women. The participants expressed that, in distressing situations community has provided a helping hand in many instances. Additionally, support from garden management and the panchayet is crucial in ensuring a good working environment for these mothers.

During the KII, the religious leader expressed, "They do not neglect. As much as they can, they sit and arrange to solve the problem, and they try to save the family. No one wants anyone's family to suffer."

A mother during the FGD shared,

“ ”

We have to work at home too. If we only did household work, we could take better care of our children. But because of financial problems, we also have to work in the tea garden. That work creates more stress. If we don't work, we won't get paid. But if we do work, then we cannot properly look after our children or manage our household. We return home to find our children sometimes haven't eaten, sometimes haven't slept, sometimes haven't even been cared for at all.

Recommendations

1. Organising courtyard discussions (Uthan Boithok), involving the panchayet and community members, to educate about community responsibilities and the importance of empathy and support.
2. Training selected female health volunteers and ECD teachers to deliver basic PFA (Psychological First Aid) and stress-management sessions following WHO mhGAP guidelines.

3. Setting up a psychological first aid desk in community healthcare centres or schools, where healthcare workers and teachers can be trained following the WHO's mhGAP framework, ensuring women can access immediate mental health support when needed.
4. Providing safe transportation, adequate washroom facilities, fans, and sheltered rest areas to protect women from heat, rain, and storms.
5. Strengthening the panchayet by offering operational and administrative support to ensure the voices of working mothers are heard.
6. Engaging men in mental health literacy programmes and sessions on childcare and household support, through Men's Dialogue Circles, to reduce women's workload and domestic violence.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that women working in tea gardens have poor psychological well-being, which also affects their children's well-being. Therefore, a comprehensive approach involving the community, panchayet, tea company management, NGOs, and the government is crucial to improve the psychological health of these working mothers and their children.