THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS AND PARENTING LAB
Harris School of Public Policy

Context, challenges and opportunities of social innovation for children and adolescents in Latin America

Ariel Kalil, PhD
University of Chicago
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Child and Adolescent Skill Development in Peru

- Gaps by maternal education in child development in Peru begin in early childhood (Araujo et al., 2021)
- These gaps are still apparent during adolescence
- Adolescents in Peru scored **less than the OECD** average in mathematics, reading and science on the PISA test
- In Peru. **29%** of adolescents (the largest share) were in the **bottom international quintile** of the socio-economic scale

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Parents are the key to children's learning

Parents are **the single greatest influence** on children.
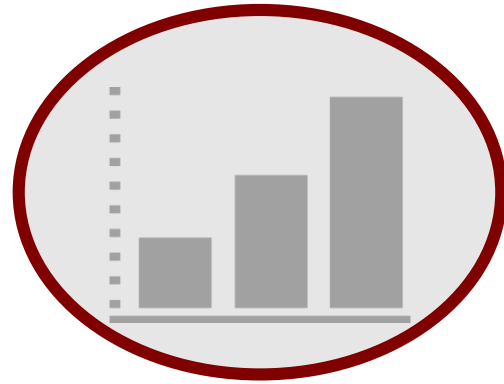
Parent engagement **varies** greatly by parental advantage.

Parent engagement **matters** for children's outcomes.

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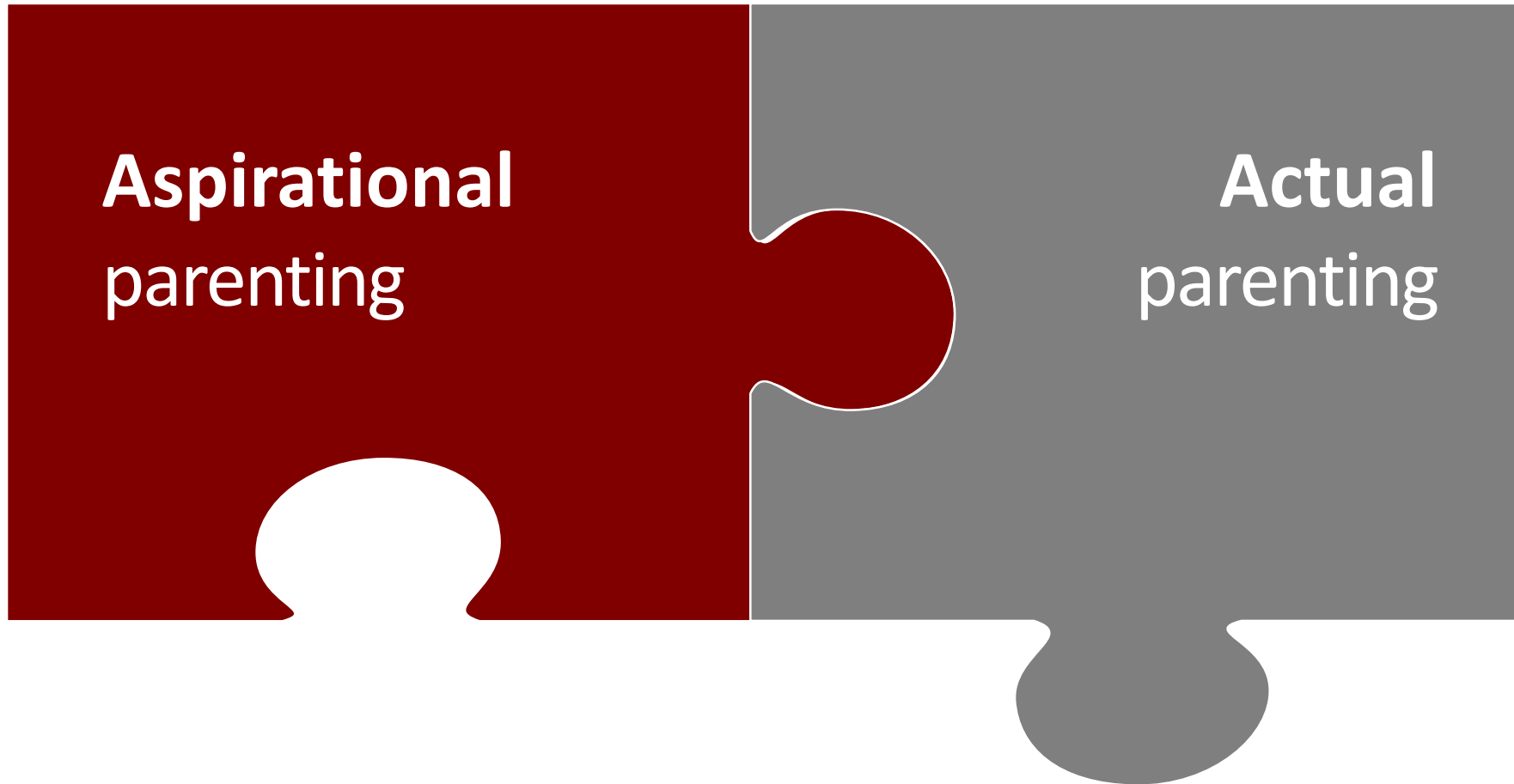# Barriers to parent engagement in children's learning
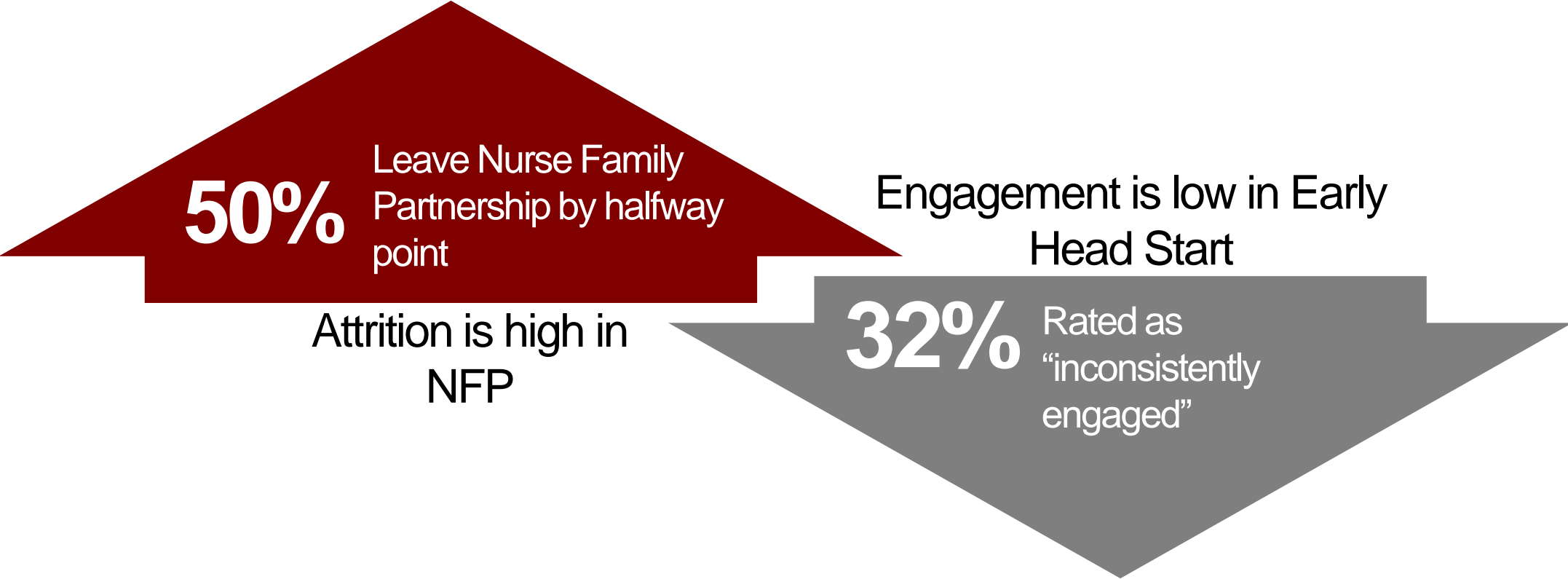
Structural Issues

Information

Cognitive Barriers

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The key to boosting child and adolescent skills is supporting parents

Aspirational
parenting

Actual
parenting

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Participation and engagement in US parenting programs in early childhood

50% Leave Nurse Family Partnership by halfway point

Attrition is high in NFP

Engagement is low in Early Head Start

32% Rated as "inconsistently engaged"

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Similar challenges for early childhood home visiting in Latin America

- Evaluation of "Cuna Mas" in Peru showed modest (.10) (albeit cost-effective) treatment impacts on parent discipline practices and child cognition and language (Araujo et al. 2021)

- Evaluation of "Reach Up" in Colombia had short term but not lasting impacts on child outcomes (Andrew et al., 2018)

- Evaluations of "Primeira Infância Melhor (PIM)" and "Programa Criança Feliz (PCF)" in Brazil showed no impacts on parent stimulation, parent-child interactions, or child health and development (Da Silva et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2022)

- Challenges re: coverage, take-up, dosage, quality, and program management

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Technology can support parent engagement and learning in childhood and adolescence

- Communicate with parents via **SMS and WhatsApp** (instead of sending a trained practitioner to families' homes)
  - Messages can deliver **content and behavioral supports**
- Provide **high-quality apps or digital libraries** for parents to use on their digital devices (instead of relying on parents to have materials at home)
- Connecting parents in **virtual peer networks**

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Technology boosts parents' access to support

Technology could complement existing services (e.g., home visiting)

- Increases access - can reach under-served families, 24 hours a day
- Reduces cognitive burdens - eases planning and literacy demands, reduces stigma
- Improves quality - can personalize programs to fit individual needs and feed information back to practitioners and government officials
- Improves engagement - keeping content novel can sustain interest
- Increases scalability - minimal personnel and delivery costs
- Strengthen bonds - facilitates communication
- Easily adaptable - to local context (language, visuals, games, songs)

Behavioral features of technology boosts parents' engagement

- **Motivates action** by managing parent procrastination (i.e., present bias)

- **Provides feedback** that is interactive, personalized and accurate

- **Strengthens parental identity** by making parental sentiment and responsibilities salient

- **Overcomes parental anxiety** and boost parental self-efficacy

- **Makes learning simple**, fun, efficient, and habitual

- **Delivers materials**, does not rely on materials that parents may (or may not) have at home

- **Relieves time** and cognitive burdens on caregivers

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Use of technology still faces challenges

- **Access** - limited internet connectivity and smartphone availability in some areas; alternative modalities needed i.e., SMS and WhatsApp

- **Digital literacy** - need user friendly design for all or offer tech support

- **Cultural accessibility** - need adaptations for language and culture

- **Status quo** - concerns about technology replacing existing services (e.g., cash transfers or home visitors)

- **Data privacy** - concerns about sharing private information or data leaks

- **Usage drop-off** - maintaining program engagement is a challenge (as it is with any intervention)

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Reflections

Innovations in program design key to boosting impact on early childhood, childhood and adolescent development

First window of Social Innovation offers a unique opportunity to articulate new ideas

Professionals should apply to the Midis call!

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