

# Acting early: from developmental science to transforming lives

Vikram Patel

*The Paul Farmer Professor of Global Health*



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Why have all countries failed to address mental health needs equitably?


Narrow biomedical framing of mental health through the prism of diagnosed mental disorders, leading to the privileging of

Biological mechanisms

Treatment over prevention

Specialist mental health care

Clinical phenomena rather than recovery



## Health Policy

---



CrossMark

# Transforming mental health systems globally: principles and policy recommendations

*Vikram Patel, Shekhar Saxena, Crick Lund, Brandon Kohrt, Christian Kieling, Charlene Sunkel, Lola Kola, Odille Chang, Fiona Charlson, Kathryn O'Neill, Helen Herrman*

Patel et al, The Lancet, 2023



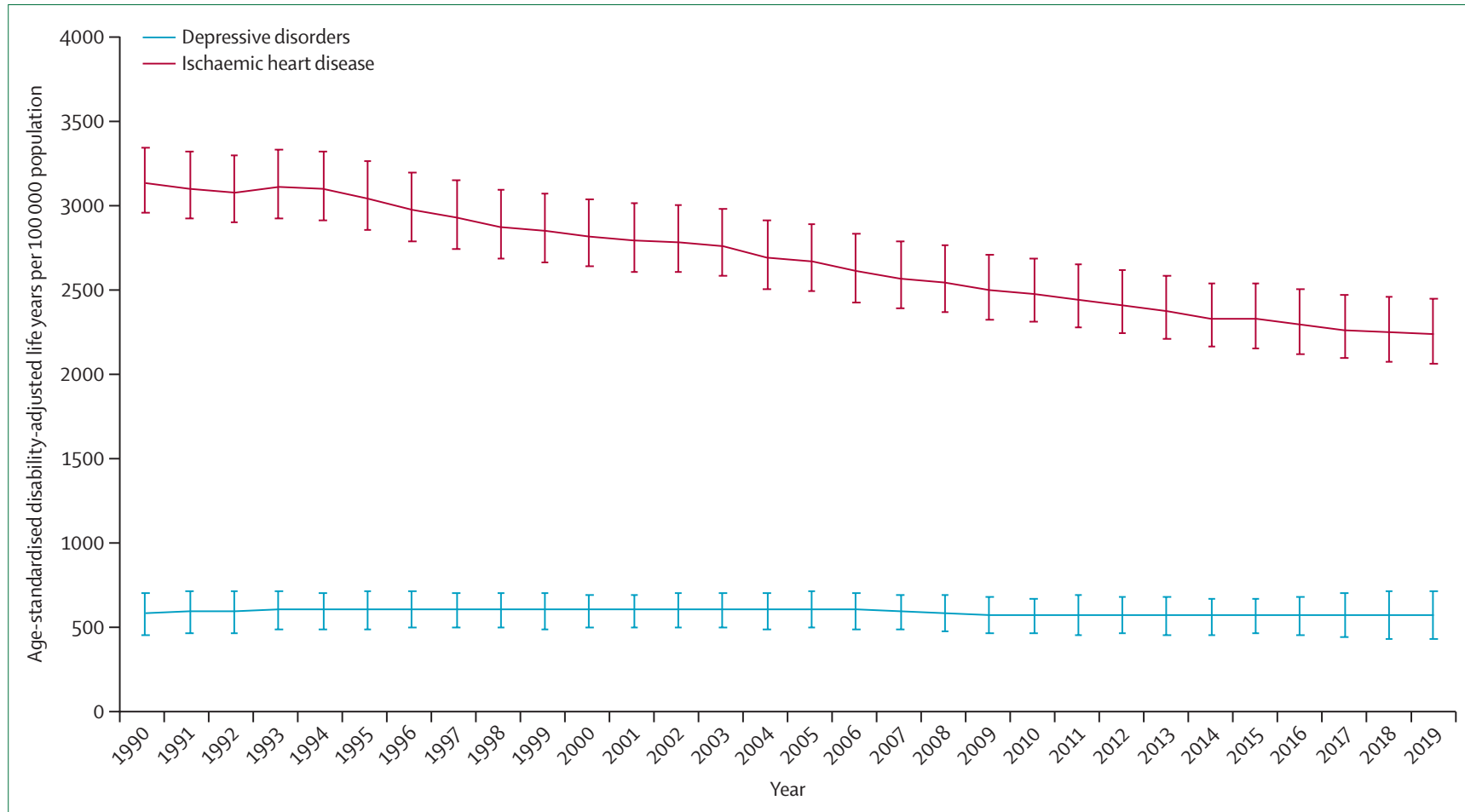
**HARVARD**  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

A focus on the treatment of diagnosed mental illnesses.



A rebalanced emphasis on promoting mental health and preventing mental ill health through targeting the social determinants of mental ill health, particularly in the early years of life.

# Treatment alone will never be sufficient to reduce the global burden of mental health problems



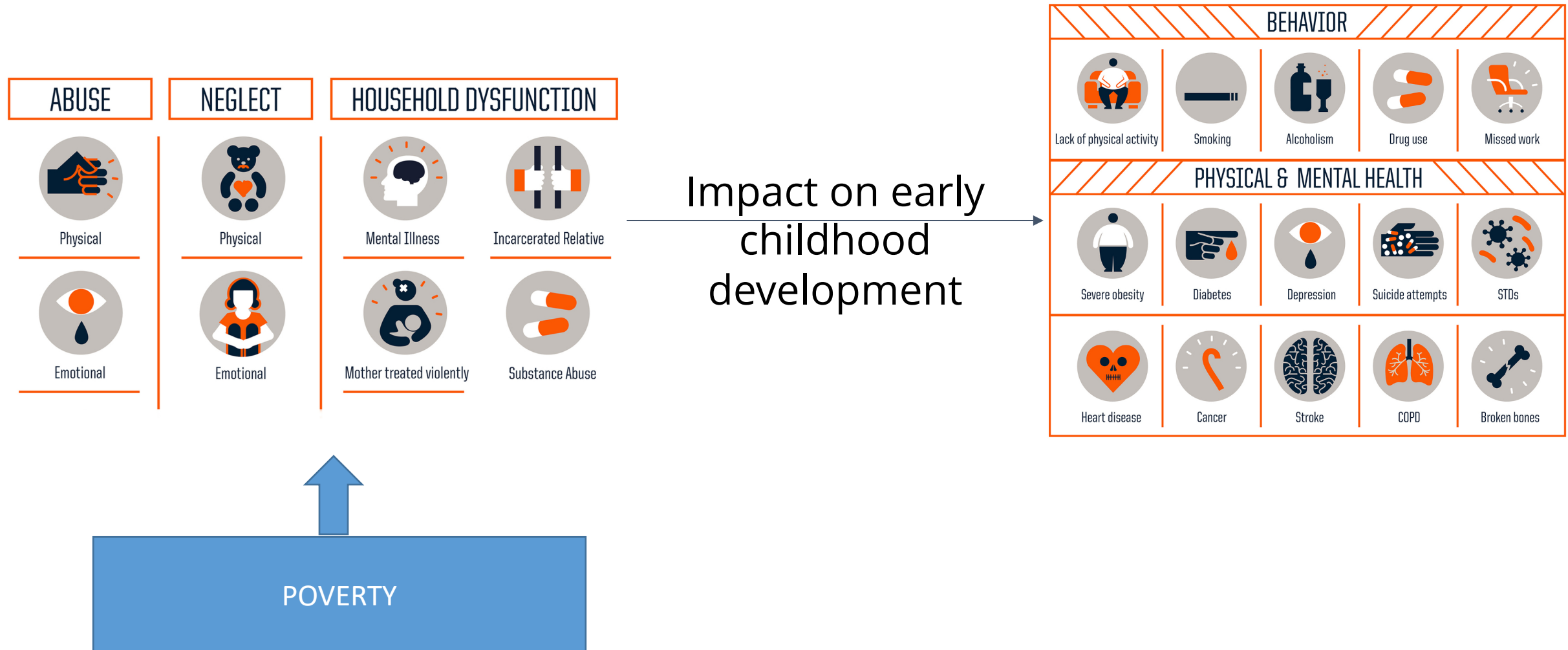
**Global burden of ischaemic heart disease and depressive disorders over time**

Data from Global Burden of Disease 2019

# The childhood origins of adult mental health



# Adverse experiences in childhood are the strongest risk factors for poor mental health across the life course

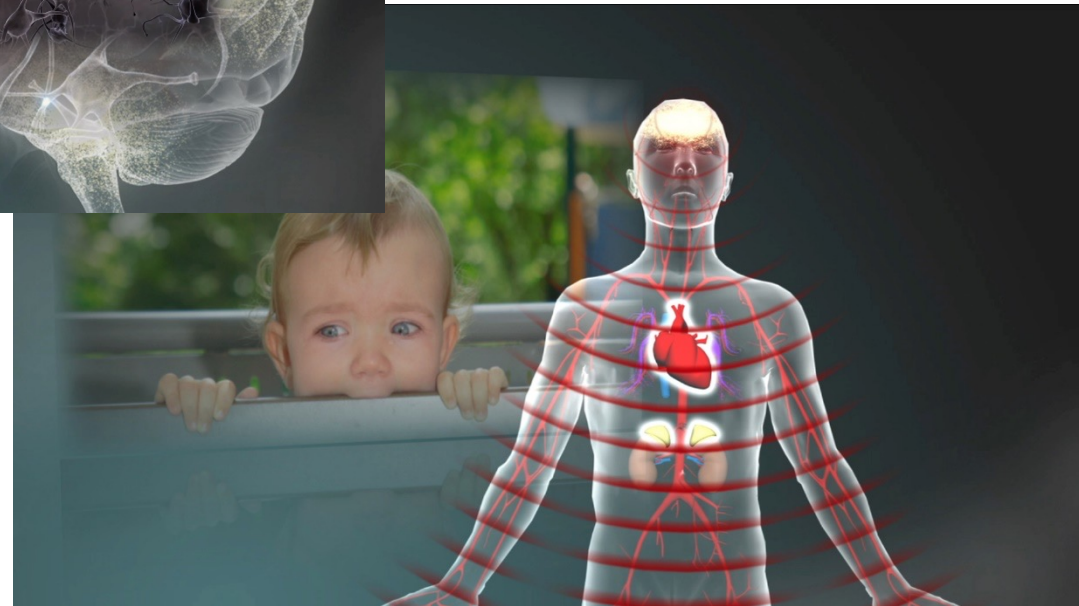


# The “Double Whammy” of Neglect on the Developing Brain



**1** Missing the interaction needed to build sturdy architecture

**2** Affected adversely by excessive stress activation that disrupts developing circuits





## **Society**

Cash transfers for low income families

Challenging discrimination against minority groups

## **Educational institutions**

Teaching emotional regulation and  
problem-solving skills

Promoting a healthy social environment

Access to mental health care

## **Home**

Parenting interventions

# Target harmful social environments across the life course

---

## PLOS MEDICINE

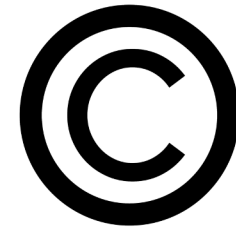
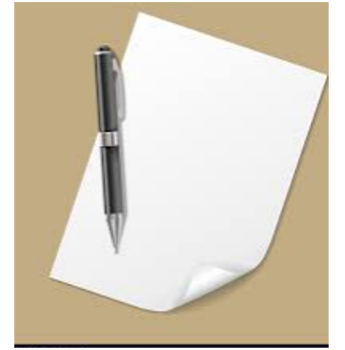
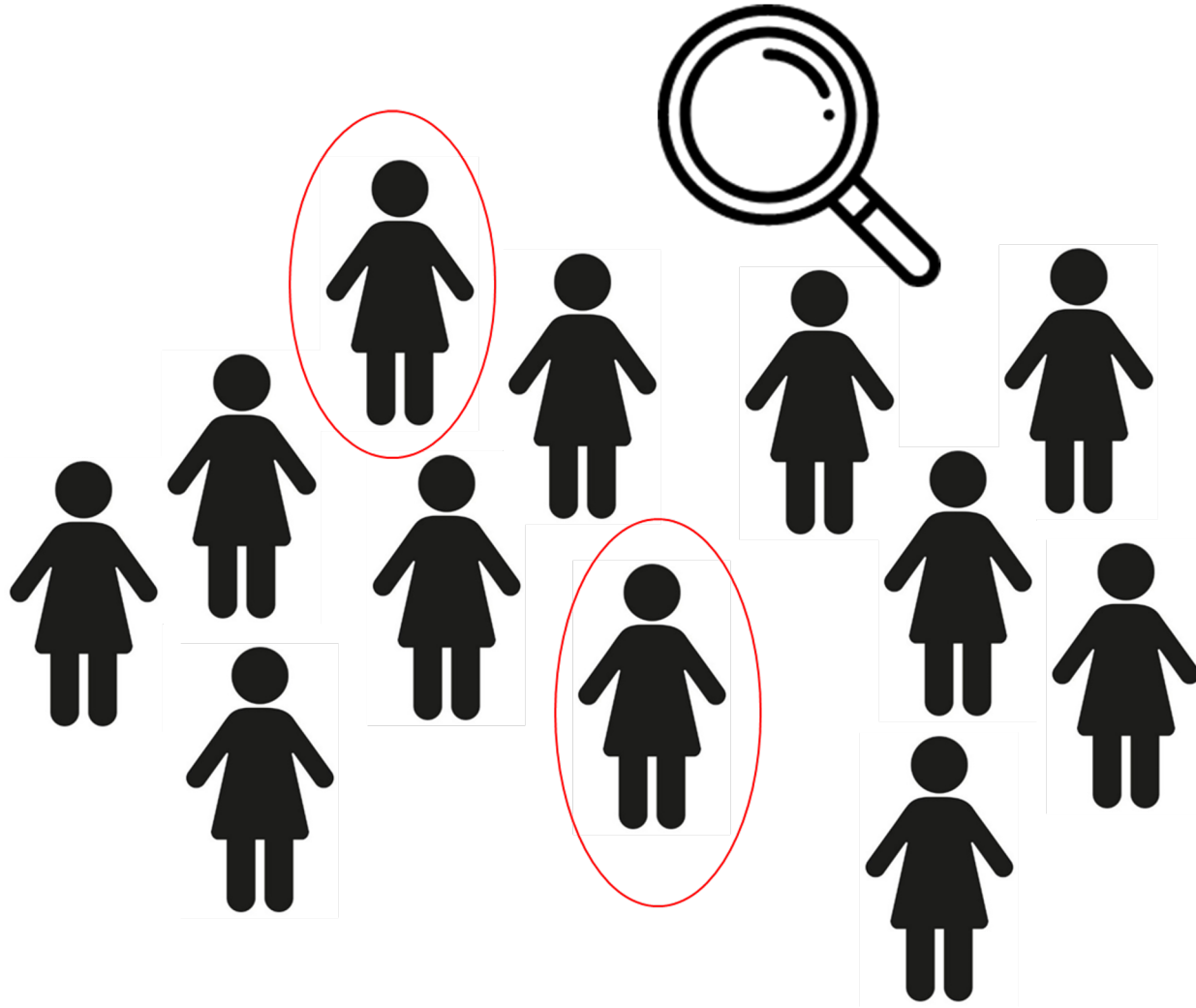
---

RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Relationship between the Bolsa Família national cash transfer programme and suicide incidence in Brazil: A quasi-experimental study

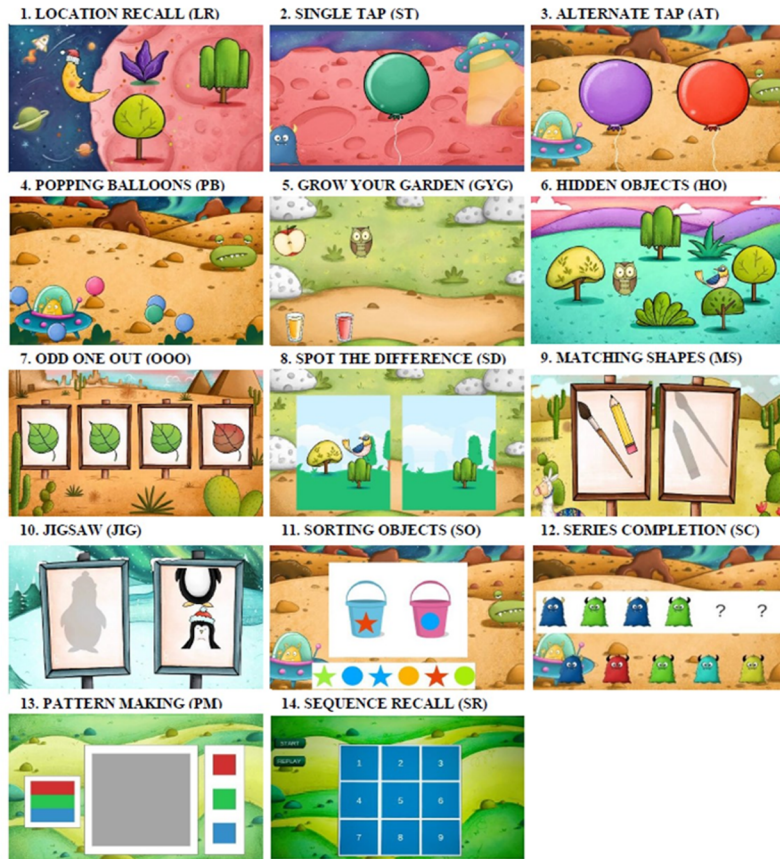
Daiane Borges Machado <sup>1,2\*</sup>, Elizabeth Williamson<sup>3</sup>, Julia M. Pescarini <sup>1,3</sup>, Flavia J. O. Alves <sup>1</sup>, Luís F. S. Castro-de-Araujo <sup>1,4</sup>, Maria Yury Ichihara <sup>1</sup>, Laura C. Rodrigues<sup>1,3</sup>, Ricardo Araya<sup>5</sup>, Vikram Patel <sup>2,6</sup>, Maurício L. Barreto<sup>1,7</sup>

# Early childhood interventions: identifying and monitoring at risk children



Existing child development assessments

# Developmental Assessment on an E-Platform (DEEP)



Low cost  
devices



No WIFI



Free of assessor  
judgment



No written  
instructions

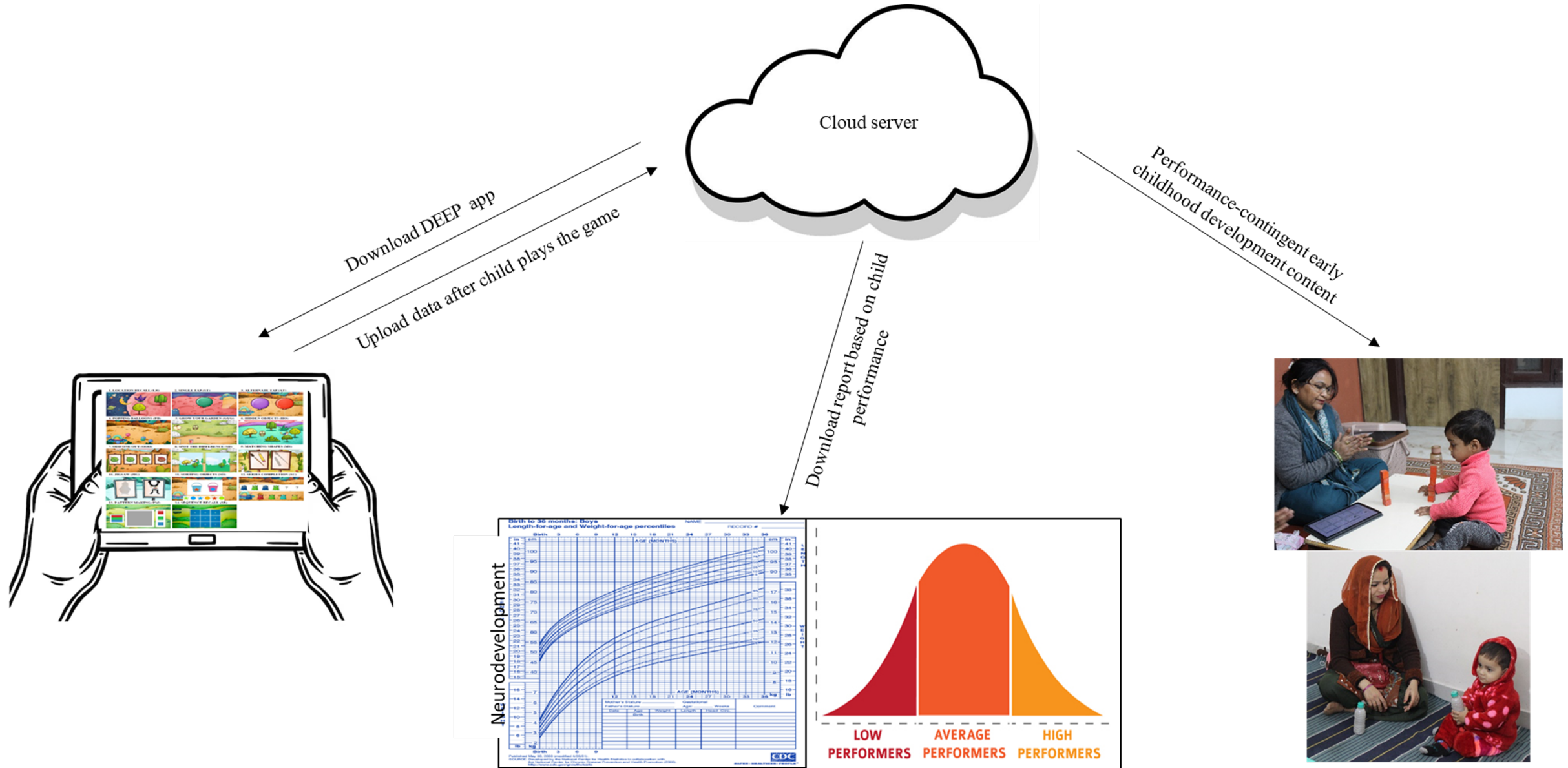


Modular



Open source

# Our vision for DEEP





# A Scalable Programme Incorporating Early child development interventions

***Alana Palana***, an integrated early learning & nutrition intervention promoting nurturing care in the first 1000 days of life, that will be embedded into the ICDS & delivered at the community level by Anganwadi Teachers (AWTs)

Video based teaching of parents in groups on how to feed, play and interact with young children





# School counselling to build social-emotional competencies to promote emotional regulation

**Problem solving is contextually and developmentally appropriate for stressed adolescents who prioritise rapid problem resolution** (often framed in terms of psychosocial difficulties rather than symptoms)

Michelson et al, Lancet CAH 2019

Malik et al, PLoS Med 2020







**EMPOWER**  
BUILDING THE WORLD'S MENTAL  
HEALTH WORKFORCE

A digital solution  
for learning, mastering, and  
delivering quality-assured psychosocial  
interventions

[www.empower.care](http://www.empower.care)

# From developmental science to life-long health

The brain is a work in progress, from birth into young adulthood

Environmental mechanisms operating across this early life course cumulatively influence mental health outcomes

A package of interventions, delivered by front-line workers / peers can reduce the risks associated with adversities and transform the capabilities of people to enjoy good health across the life course