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Brief

Early Childhood Outcomes

Summary

The intact family, maternal and non-maternal care quality, the home environment, and parents' religious involvement all appear to influence early childhood outcomes. Children's social and behavioral development is also linked to the quality of care provided by their mothers, and for those in childcare, by the quality non-maternal care. Research also suggests that the emotional well-being of young children is associated with their parents' religious practices.

- **Infants in married families are more likely to exhibit positive behavior than those whose mothers are single or cohabiting.** Infants of married mothers behaved more positively during structured interaction than infants of cohabiting and single mothers, with no difference between infants in cohabiting and single families.[1]

- **Children in cognitively stimulating home environments are less likely to exhibit hyperactive or antisocial behavior.** Decreased cognitive stimulation in the home, as measured by the amount of maternal involvement, presence of learning materials, and the variety of cognitive stimulation was a significant predictor of later hyperactivity and antisocial behavior in African-American and European-American children age three to five.[2]

- **Three-year-olds who are less securely attached to their mothers are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems.** Children's insecure attachments to their mothers at 36 months significantly predicted mothers' and caregivers' ratings of internalizing behaviors for boys and girls, and externalizing behaviors for boys.[3]

- **Children who received more sensitive care from their mothers as preschoolers tend to have stronger social skills as first graders.** Maternal sensitivity in mother-child interactions from infancy through the pre-school years was the strongest and most consistent predictor of children's social skills and behaviors throughout childhood. The more sensitive a mother was, the better the outcomes. All other predictors including family environment, socioeconomic status, maternal education, and child care quality, amount and type were less consistent predictors.[4]

- **Six-year-old boys who experience conflict in the home are more likely to engage in disruptive behaviors.** Conflict within the family was associated with an increase in the likelihood of boys' disruptive behavior at age six and a slower rate of behavioral improvement over time.[5]

- **First-graders and kindergartners whose parents attend religious services exhibit higher levels of self-control.** Compared to children whose parents did not attend church at all, those whose parents attended church services, whether frequently or sporadically, tended to have a higher level of self-control while under parental supervision in their homes, according to parents' reports.[6]

- **First-graders and kindergartners whose parents attend religious services are less likely to experience anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem**

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and sadness. Children were less likely to have internalizing behavior problems (in terms of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness) if either of their parents attended church services and/or if both parents attended with the same frequency (i.e. either sporadically or frequently).[7]

- **Maternal employment in the first year is associated with lower levels of cognitive development at ages three through eight.** In this study, having a mother who was employed during the first year of life had a negative effect on the cognitive development of white children. The longer the hours a mother worked, the greater this negative effect was.[8]

- **Children who spend more time in daycare are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems.** Children who spent more time in daycare centers in early childhood were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems through the sixth grade.[9]

- **Among five-year-olds in child care, those who received more sensitive and stimulating care in the first three years exhibit, on average, higher cognitive ability.** Four-and-a-half-year-old children in child care who had received higher quality (sensitive & stimulating) caregiving from six to 36 months had higher cognitive ability scores in letter-word identification, applied problem-solving, language comprehension, and short-term memory, regardless of concurrent caregiving.[10]

Endnotes

1 Stacy R. Aronson and Aletha C. Huston, "The Mother-Infant Relationship in Single, Cohabiting, and Married Families: A Case for Marriage?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, No. 1 (2004): 5-18.

2 Mark F. Schmitz, "Influences of Race and Family Environment on Child Hyperactivity and Antisocial Behavior," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65, No. 4 (November 2003): 835-849.

3 Kathleen McCartney *et al.*, "Testing a Maternal Attachment Model of Behavior Problems in Early Childhood," *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 45, No. 4 (2004): 765-778.

4 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, "Social Functioning in First Grade: Associations with Earlier Home and Child Care Predictors with Current Classroom Experiences," *Child Development* 74, No. 6 (November/December 2003): 1639-1662.

5 Alexandra Loukas, "Developmental Trajectories of Disruptive Behavior Problems Among Sons of Alcoholics: Effects of Parent Psychopathology, Family Conflict, and Child Undercontrol," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 112, No. 1 (2003): 119-131.

6 John P. Bartkowski, Xiaohe Xu, and Martin L. Levin, "Religion and Child Development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study," *Social Science Research* 37, No. 1 (March 2007): 18-36.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Jane Waldfogel, Wen-Jui Han, and Jeanne Brooks-Gun, "The Effects of Early Maternal Employment on Child Cognitive Development," *Demography* 39, No. 2 (May 2002): 369-392.

9 Jay Belsky *et al.*, "Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?" *Child Development* 78, No. 2 (March/April 2007): 681-701.

10 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, "Does Quality of Child Care Affect Child Outcomes at Age 4 1/2?" *Developmental Psychology* 39, No. 3 (2003): 451-469.

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