



Society for Research in Child Development

Office for Policy and Communications

1313 L Street, NW • Washington, DC 20005

OFFICE: (202) 289-7905 • FAX: (202) 289-4203

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Contact Information:

Andrea Browning

Society for Research in Child Development

Office for Policy and Communications

(202) 289-7905

abrowning@srcd.org

Family Resources, Parenting Quality Influence Children's Early Cognitive Development

Even among low-income families, mothers with greater social and economic resources were more supportive in parenting their children than those with fewer resources, which in turn influenced the children's cognitive performance. That's the main finding of a new study that considers how economic factors and parenting quality jointly influence children's development. Conducted by researchers at the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education (CRCDE) in New York University, the study appears in the July/August 2008 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers examined 2,089 low-income mothers and their children, who took part in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Study, visiting homes when the children were 14, 24, and 36 months old. During the visits, researchers measured the quality of parenting (by observing interactions between mothers and their children, and by observing the home environment) and families' economic resources (specifically, per capita income) to determine how these factors influence children's cognitive development. They also looked at the influence of factors such as mothers' education, children's birth weight, how often mothers read on their own, and where children's fathers lived, and sought to learn whether children influence the way their parents interact with them.

Families' economic resources and the quality of parenting each played a unique role in contributing to children's cognitive development, the study found. Mothers who had greater economic resources were more supportive in parenting of their children, which in turn influenced children's cognitive performance.

Children's cognitive performance also influenced parenting, with mothers being more supportive (displaying more warmth and sensitivity, and encouraging more cognitive stimulation) in response to their children's developmental achievements.

"These findings point to the importance of examining parenting resources and parenting quality as joint contributors to children's development," according to Julieta Lugo-Gil, who conducted the research when she was at the CRCDE in New York University. Lugo-Gil, now at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., was the study's lead author. "Programs that aim solely at supplementing family earnings may not have a strong impact on children's cognitive development; programs that offer a combination of cash assistance and services designed to improve the quality of parenting may be more effective."

Lugo-Gil also called for programs that enhance parents' resources beyond income alone. "Strengthening the quality of parenting should also include services aimed at improving family literacy and education, reducing parental stress, and providing high-quality child care."

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 79, Issue 4, *Family Resources and Parenting Quality: Links to Children's Cognitive Development across the First Three Years* by Lugo-Gil, J, and Tamis-LeMonda, CS (New York University). Copyright 2008 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.