

Does maternal employment influence poor children's social development?

Bruce Fuller^{a,*}, Gretchen Caspary^a, Sharon Lynn Kagan^b,
Christiane Gauthier^a, Danny Shih-Cheng Huang^a,
Judith Carroll^c, Jan McCarthy^c

^a *University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA*

^b *Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA*

^c *Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA*

Abstract

Various initiatives over the past 40 years have aimed to strengthen children's early learning and social development. One policy theory—manifest in recent welfare reforms—postulates that requiring single mothers to work more outside the home will advance children's well-being. We first examine whether young children's social development is related to maternal employment among 405 women who entered welfare-to-work programs in 1998. For girls, age 24–42 months, we found that their mother's recent employment duration was significantly associated with a lower incidence of aggressive behavior and inattentiveness, measured by two scales from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL 2/3). Yet these relationships with employment were weaker than more robust associations observed for proximal child-rearing practices, including the frequency of reading with the child, enforcing a regular bedtime, the propensity to spank the child, as well as levels of maternal depression. We then assess whether broader measures of the mother's economic security help to predict these proximal determinants of development. We observed that food security and indicators of job quality consistently predicted the proximal factors. Structural equation models (SEM) provided additional evidence that these broader indicators of economic security, but not recent employment per se, operated through parenting practices and maternal depression to influence girls' and boys' social development. These results are consistent with recent findings from random-assignment experiments, showing that employment gains rarely affect child outcomes unless mothers' income and broader economic security also improve.

© 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Inc.

Keywords: Maternal employment; Family policy; Social development

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-510-643-5362.

E-mail address: b_fuller@uclink4.berkeley.edu (B. Fuller).

1. Introduction

Policy makers, since the 1960s, have crafted various initiatives aimed at boosting children's early growth or their parents' capacity to advance child development. One recent policy innovation requires single mothers who draw welfare assistance to work after their infant turns 3–12 months of age. Under the old AFDC program (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) mothers with children under 3 were exempt from work requirements, and few women with youngsters under 5 were forced to work (Friedlander & Burtless, 1995).

Beyond the “work-first” emphasis of the 1996 reforms, some states now provide a range of income and work supports—subsidized child care, intensive job preparation, and child health insurance—designed to raise the family's economic vitality, rather than banking exclusively on the meliorative effects that allegedly stem from employment per se (Chase-Lansdale & Pittman, 2000; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith 1998; Mayer, 1997).

One implication of this policy revolution is that young children's immediate environments may be changing in consequential ways: more time spent away from the mother as she returns to the work force, altered parenting practices, and more time spent in nonmaternal forms of child care. Policy makers postulate that this evolving social ecology of childhood will yield social, cognitive, and moral benefits. But little empirical work, to date, has substantiated or contested these claims when it comes to low-income families.

Developmentalists have long debated whether to expect stronger child-level effects from interventions aimed at (1) improving the mother's well-being or her parenting practices, (2) expanding access to, and raising the quality of, child-care programs, or (3) advancing the family's economic stability through work and income-support programs (Burchinal, 1999; Hess & Holloway, 1984; McGroder, 2000; Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes, & Whitebook, 1994; St. Pierre & Layzer, 1998). And neighborhood-level conceptions of the child's environment have been advanced that take into account social support, community norms, and culturally embedded practices that help to sustain child rearing (Brooks-Gunn & Aber, 1998).

The present paper begins with one component question: whether a mother's recent employment history is associated with stronger social development for their child at 24–42 months of age. We are curious about whether, and with what magnitude, maternal employment is associated with fewer behavioral problems displayed by young children—when examined alongside proximal determinants of development, including reading and pro-learning activities, discipline practices, child-related routines (e.g., regular bedtimes), and the mother's own psychological well-being. In this light, we place the emphasis on maternal employment back within the child's broader home environment.

1.1. A main effect of maternal employment on child development

Two theoretical disputes persist in the literature related to how maternal employment may be related to early learning and social development. The first is whether young children's developmental trajectories are raised or suppressed—either directly or mediated through proximal determinants—when their mothers work outside the home. In short, can we observe a main effect from maternal employment, and if so, is this relationship positive or negative? Another

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات