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Early Skill Formation and the Efficiency of Parental Investment: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Home Visiting*

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Abstract

This paper presents evidence on early skill formation and parental investment using an experimentally designed, home visiting program targeting disadvantaged Irish families. Program effects from pregnancy to 18 months are estimated using measures of parenting and child cognitive, noncognitive and physical development. Permutation testing, a stepdown procedure, and inverse probability weighting are applied to account for small sample size, multiple hypothesis testing, and attrition. The program's impact is concentrated on parental behaviors and the home environment with small to moderate effect sizes found. Deficits in parenting skills can be offset within a relatively short timeframe, yet continued investment may be required to observe child effects.

Keywords: Early childhood intervention; child development; randomized control trial; multiple hypotheses; permutation testing.

JEL Classification: D13, I26, J13, C93.

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