

Developmental and Economic Effects of Parenting Programs for Expectant Parents and Parents of Preschool-age Children

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Introduction

This paper seeks to answer the question of whether or not parenting programs yield economic benefits to society. Authors identify effective parenting education programs, measure the parent and/or child benefits, determine if gains are long-term, and then estimate the broader benefit to society.

Programs and Potential Benefits

Children are affected by who their parents are, what they know, believe, and value, what they expect from their children, and everything they do. Living in a lower-income family is associated with higher rates of school failure, child maltreatment, and criminal activity. Quality parenting programs can counteract the negative effects of poor parenting. Preventing these negative effects could lead to substantial cost savings for society.

The goals of parent education programs are to help parents create environments that support safety and development. This is believed to effectively prepare them for adulthood. Programs vary widely in their focus and intensity, but all share this same goal. Few programs have been formally evaluated for effectiveness. The studies that have been done were lower-level studies that did not control for extraneous variables, so those results cannot be used to estimate the financial benefit to society.

Methodology

Programs were selected according to the following criteria: serving expectant parents and parents of preschool-age children; providing direct service delivery; and serve at-risk families. The study used a control group, allowed for estimation of the impact of each program's unique characteristics, measured child outcomes, and showed impacts beyond the conclusion of the program. Researchers identified popular programs, used a general keyword search to find others, and then nominated programs to use.

Results

For each program, participants were matched for characteristics, then randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. The impacts of each program are listed below:

1. *Families and Schools Together (FAST)*: Elementary school teachers rated participating children as less anxious, more attentive, more academically competent, and with fewer behavior problems.

2. *DARE to be You*: Parents showed an increased internal locus of control and sense of confidence in their parenting skills. Children showed improved behavior and developmental level.
3. *The Incredible Years*: Parents were rated as having more positive parenting behaviors. Children showed decreased negative classroom behaviors.
4. *Nurse Family Partnership*: Children had fewer arrests, convictions, and probation violations. They also used less alcohol and drugs. Mothers had fewer pregnancies, less substance abuse, and less involvement with the criminal justice system.
5. *Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI)*: Children showed increased achievement and classroom adjustment.
6. *Reach Out and Read*: Older toddlers showed increased knowledge and use of vocabulary.
7. *The Family Check-Up*: Mothers became more involved and sons became less destructive.
8. *The Triple P Positive Parenting Program*: Parents reported less dysfunctional parenting and improved child behavior.
9. *Parenting Education Program for Teen Mothers*: Findings indicated fewer reports of child abuse.
10. *Early Head Start*: Parents were more emotionally supportive. Children were more involved with their parents and showed fewer behavior problems.
11. *Healthy Families New York*: Reduced self-reports of abusive parenting and greater prevalence of positive parenting.
12. *Parent-Child Home Program*: Results indicated increased graduation rates, improved levels of early reading skills, and improved socio-emotional skills. Parents increased their learning-supportive behaviors.

These programs showed positive and long-lasting effects on parenting skills. The results of a cost-benefit analysis showed that families who did not receive any special services consumed \$40,000 more in public resources than families who did. These benefits were estimated to be greater for high-risk mothers. For every dollar invested in parent education programs, the return is between \$1.80 and \$5.70.

Conclusion

Parenting education programs positively affect knowledge, skills, and disciplinary practices. They also create improvements in children's behavioral, safety, and academic

outcomes. These programs can create significant financial benefits for society. Comprehensive, rather than stand-alone approaches, are recommended as most effective.

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