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Parent-Child Interactions and Child Outcomes: Evidence from Randomized Intervention

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Abstract

Parent-child interactions are determined endogenously by child behavior, making identification of causal effects challenging. We overcome this endogeneity by analyzing a randomized, universal parent-training intervention on parents of preschool children. Evaluation of adolescent outcomes 10 years after the program suggests improvements to externalizing behaviors and well-being of children in the intervention group, mediated by changes to parenting during early childhood. These outcomes are not explained adequately by extant models of parent-child interactions, and so we explore alternative explanations. We show that benefits of early childhood interventions extend beyond low-socioeconomic households.

Keywords: early childhood intervention, randomized controlled trial, parental investment, socioemotional skill, discipline, child development *JEL code*: D13, J13, J18, J24

1. Introduction

This study reports empirical evidence of a causal effect of parent-child interactions during preschool years on adolescent children's behavioral outcomes. We focus on two aspects of parent-child interactions—parents' positive engagement with a child and parental discipline. Psychologists have

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