Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Effect of socioeconomic status disparity on child language and neural outcome: how early is early?

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ABSTRACT: It is not news that poverty adversely affects child outcome. The literature is replete with reports of deleterious effects on developmental outcome, cognitive function, and school performance in children and youth. Causative factors include poor nutrition, exposure to toxins, inadequate parenting, lack of cognitive stimulation, unstable social support, genetics, and toxic environments. Less is known regarding how early in life adverse effects may be detected. This review proposes to elucidate “how early is early” through discussion of seminal articles related to the effect of socioeconomic status on language outcome and a discussion of the emerging literature on effects of socioeconomic status disparity on brain structure in very young children. Given the young ages at which such outcomes are detected, the critical need for early targeted interventions for our youngest is underscored. Further, the fiscal reasonableness of initiating quality interventions supports these initiatives. As early life adversity produces lasting and deleterious effects on developmental outcome and brain structure, increased focus on programs and policies directed to reducing the impact of socioeconomic disparities is essential.

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