

Preparing for Life: Testing the Effectiveness of Early Intervention in an Irish Experimental Trial

Abstract

Intervening early in a child's life has been shown to be effective from a biological and economic perspective. Early intervention can reduce socioeconomic disparities in children's health and development, yet the evidence base is restricted to a small number of primarily US studies. This study investigates the impact of an Irish early intervention programme, Preparing for Life (PFL), from birth until 36 months using a randomized control trial design. PFL is a five year programme which aims to improve the life course of disadvantaged Irish children by intervening during pregnancy and working with the families until the children start school. The intervention involves regular home visits from a mentor commencing antenatally and the Triple P Parenting Program commencing at age two. This study explores the impact of PFL by comparing the treatment (n=115) and control (n=118) across 8 domains including child development, child health, parenting, home environment, maternal health and wellbeing, social support, childcare, and household factors and socio-economic status. Treatment effects are estimated using permutation testing to account for small sample size, inverse probability weighting to account for differential attrition, and the stepdown procedure to account for multiple hypothesis testing. Significant treatment effects are identified for child health at each time point; yet the majority of effects on child development are restricted to the later time periods. There is also some evidence that the programme raises the efficiency of parental investment by improving the quality of the home environment and parenting skills.