

# Timing of poverty in childhood critical to later outcomes [US] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

It is well known that children who live in poverty have more trouble in school and more problems socially than other children. Now investigators funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) find that while children who live in chronic poverty from birth through age 9 score lowest on tests of school readiness and social competence, poverty at any time during early childhood is detrimental.

The researchers from the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network report their findings in the July/August 2005 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

To investigate whether the length of time a child's family experiences poverty or the child's age when the family is poor is more important in affecting a child's educational and social competencies, the researchers looked at families in the NICHD Study of Early Child Care. The families studied were either poor throughout their child's early life (from birth to age 9), poor only when the child was under age 3, or only after the child was 4, or never.

"We found that children from families who were poor any time during the early childhood period did not perform as well as those who were never poor," said Marion O'Brien, Ph.D., one of 26 researchers who participated in the study.

"Parents who were poor provided less stimulating and supportive home environments than those who were never poor, and if families became poor after the child was age 4, the quality of their home environments dropped over time," she said.

The findings contradict other research suggesting that poverty early in a child's life is likely to have particularly serious long-term effects. "We did not find this to be true if the family moved out of poverty later," said Dr. O'Brien. "Instead, we found poverty later in childhood &em; in this case from age 4 to 9 &em; was linked to more school and social problems."

The findings suggest, she said, that efforts to help parents of young children move out of poverty are likely to have long-term benefits for children's school performance and social-emotional well being, she said.

- reprinted from the Society for Research in Child Development

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