

Maternal work early in the lives of children and its distal associations with achievement and behavior problems: A meta-analysis ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Study in pdf ^[2]

Abstract:

This meta-analysis of 69 studies (1,483 effect sizes) used random effects models to examine maternal employment during infancy/early childhood in relation to 2 major domains of child functioning: achievement and behavior problems. Analyses of studies that spanned 5 decades indicated that, with a few exceptions, early employment was not significantly associated with later achievement or internalizing/externalizing behaviors. The exceptions were for teacher ratings of achievement and internalizing behaviors: employment was associated with higher achievement and fewer internalizing behaviors. Substantial heterogeneity among the effect sizes prompted examination of moderators. Sample-level moderator analyses pointed to the importance of socioeconomic and contextual variables, with early employment most beneficial when families were challenged by single parenthood or welfare status. Maternal employment during Years 2 and 3 was associated with higher achievement. Some moderator analyses indicated negative effects of employment for middle-class and 2-parent families and for very early employment (child's first year). Associations also differed depending on whether effect sizes were adjusted for contextual variables. Only 1 study-level moderator (sex of first author) was significant after adjusting for other moderators. The small effect size and primarily nonsignificant results for main effects of early maternal employment should allay concerns about mothers working when children are young. However, negative findings associated with employment during the child's first year are compatible with calls for more generous maternal leave policies. Results highlight the importance of social context for identifying under which conditions and for which subgroups early maternal employment is associated with positive or negative child outcomes.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: outcomes ^[4]

mother's labour force participation ^[5]

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