

Perry Preschoolers: Intergenerational Effects Frequently Asked Questions

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Perry was a preschool program; What are the implications for providing disadvantaged children with high-quality ECE programs at birth?

Perry was a program for 4- and 5-year-olds and did provide significant returns. However, the body of research on early childhood development suggests that starting at birth or even prenatally, can yield higher benefits for treated individuals and society. For example, our cost/benefit analysis of the birth-to-age-five ABC/CARE program inspired by Perry was 0-5 and produced similar results with a higher ROI, particularly in the health of recipients at age 35 and the economic gains of mothers entering into the workforce. The ROI for investing in disadvantaged children from birth is 13% per annum. Policymakers would be wise to invest in programs that begin at birth to maximize positive outcomes.

How is this Perry study different from Professor Heckman's previous Perry studies?

This research provided Heckman and his co-author with the opportunity to understand the program's impact on the participants over their life course—and the lives of their offspring—while also addressing critics' concerns, such as the small sample size and compromises in the randomization of the treatment and control groups. After accounting for these and putting the data through a number of rigorous tests, this new analysis validates the return on investment in early childhood education for disadvantaged children.

The latest data also allowed a first deeper look into the possible multi-generation effects of early childhood education on achievement, economic gains and upward mobility by analyzing various life outcomes of the children of the Perry Preschool participants. These life outcomes indicate that high-quality early childhood education has the potential to break the cycle of poverty across multiple generations.

Who is included in the “multi-generation” outcomes?

The Perry Preschool participants, now at midlife, and their children at various ages.

Do any of the outcomes vary by the gender of the Perry participants or their children?

Yes, gender differences in treatment effects are quite common. While present for both male and female offspring of treated participants, the wide range of beneficial effects—lower school suspensions and crime, higher education and employment—are particularly strong for the male children of participants, and especially so for the male children of male participants. For example, Perry significantly promoted stable family lives among the participants and their children. While all children of Perry participants spent at least three times the amount of time (compared to their control counterparts) in a two-parent home before age 18, male children of male participants spent about 15 times as much time.

How do you define stronger family lives?

Treated Perry participants had more stable marriages and were more likely to raise their children in stable two-parent homes. They tended to have children slightly later in life and remain stably married by the time their children turned 18, all of

which provided more attention from their parents and resources for the successful development of the children of the Perry participants.

Who are the study's participants and how were they chosen?

The HighScope Perry Program was a randomized social experiment conducted during the early- to mid-1960s in the district of the Perry Elementary School, a public school in Ypsilanti, Michigan, near Detroit. The project aimed to study the impacts of providing high-quality preschool experience to socioeconomically and developmentally disadvantaged children. The sample size was small: 123 children allocated over five entry cohorts, drawn from the population surrounding the Perry Elementary School. Candidate families for the study were identified from a survey of the families of the students attending the elementary school, by neighborhood group referrals and through door-to-door canvassing. The eligibility rules for participation were that the participants (i) be African-American; (ii) have a low IQ (between 70 and 85) at study entry; and, (iii) be disadvantaged as measured by parental employment level, parental education and housing density (persons per room). The Perry study targeted families who were more disadvantaged than most other African-American families in the United States but were representative of a large segment of the disadvantaged African-American population.

How does the latest Perry Preschool research differ from similar studies in the field?

Perry provides greater insight into the currently popular notion that neighborhoods play an important role in shaping the life outcomes of disadvantaged children. Unlike other studies, which are large data dumps of relatively unfiltered research, we were able to look at the effects of providing access to high-quality early

childhood education, the strength of individual family life and location. We compared neighborhoods of Perry participants with the neighborhoods of their children. The research finds that children of the treated Perry participants seem to be excelling in various life domains despite growing up in neighborhoods that are similar to or slightly worse off than the neighborhoods of the control group. For these children of the Perry participants, the evidence suggests that the home environment and family life matter more than neighborhood environment when it comes to promoting positive outcomes.

How did the study measure later in life outcomes?

This research documents the long-term treatment effects on the Perry participants at late midlife using rigorous small-sample econometric techniques. Among the positive, documented impacts are significant reductions in criminal activity, especially violent crime, increases in earnings and employment, better health and better executive functioning and socioemotional skills. The research goes further to evaluate the impact of the program on the children of the Perry participants. This is possible since the Perry participants are past age 50 and most of their children are now adults, allowing us to study these children's outcomes for the first time.

What are the policy implications of these findings?

The long-term analysis of Perry preschoolers at midlife is yet further evidence that investing in high-quality early childhood education can produce personal gains for disadvantaged children and deliver better outcomes for society. It also shows strong intergenerational effects not only in achievement but also in family life that, in turn, build greater personal and social gains spanning multiple generations. As a result,



high-quality early childhood education emerges as an effective tool for fighting intergenerational poverty.