



New Research

# Perry Preschool: Intergenerational Effects

## Early childhood education strengthens families and can break the cycle of poverty.

*Professor Heckman's newest research looks at the life outcomes of Perry Preschool participants at midlife, as well as the outcomes of their own children. After putting the data through a series of rigorous tests, Heckman and his co-author find that the original participants of the program had significant gains in personal and family life outcomes that provided their children with positive second-generation effects on education, health, employment and civic life. Early childhood education resulted in stronger families and significantly contributed to upward mobility in the next generation—an indication that early childhood education can be an effective way to break the cycle of poverty.*

### **Perry: the program that inspired modern early childhood**

**education.** Originally developed as a randomized-controlled trial to determine whether quality early childhood education could increase the IQ of at-risk children from low-income families, Perry's components became the model for high-quality early childhood education today. Parental education and partnership, home visiting and child-centric early learning are now accepted best practices in birth-to-five early development and learning. Therefore, the treatment effects on Perry participants and their children have wide-ranging applications for more fully understanding the social benefits of early childhood education, especially when the results are seen in context with studies of more comprehensive programs inspired by Perry, such as the North Carolina Abecedarian Project.

### **A critical look at the data and effects on the next generation.**

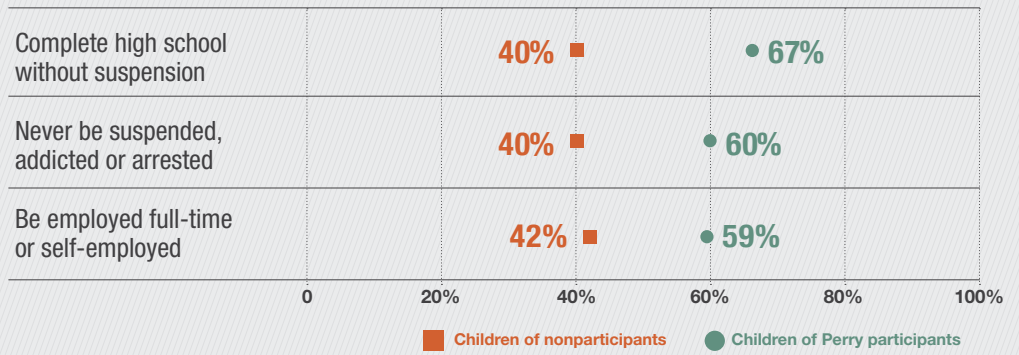
New data on outcomes after midlife provided the Heckman research team with the opportunity to understand the program's impact on the participants over their life course while addressing critics' concerns, such as the small sample size and compromises in the randomization of the treatment and control 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 deep look into the

possible intergenerational effects of early childhood education on achievement, economic gains and upward mobility.

**Strong gains among the original participants.** While Perry failed to permanently increase a crude IQ measure of the treated, simplistic measures of cognitive achievement prove to be poor indicators of life success. Children treated with early childhood education have significantly better life outcomes than the untreated children. Treatment in Perry significantly increased the participants' employment, health, cognitive and socioemotional skills and reduced the male participants' criminal activity, especially violent crime. Improvements in childhood home environments and parental attachment are seen as an important source of the long-term benefits of the program.

**Positive multigenerational effects.** Heckman and his co-author found substantial second-generation effects on education, employment, crime, school suspensions and health. The children of participants were less likely to be suspended from school, and more likely to complete regular or any other form of high school and to be employed full-time with some college experience. While present for both male and female children of participants, the wide range of beneficial effects are particularly strong for the male children of participants, especially those of male participants.

## Children of Perry Preschool participants are more likely than children of non-participants to:



### High-quality early learning positively impacts later family life.

This latest analysis shows that effective early childhood development leads to better adult family lives. Perry participants had more stable marriages and were more likely to provide their children a more stable two-parent home in which to grow up. They tended to have children slightly later in life and remain stably married by the time their children turned 18, all of which afforded parents the ability to provide more resources and attention to the successful development of their children.



All children of Perry Preschool participants **spend 3 times more time with stably married parents before age 18** compared to children of nonparticipants.

Male children of male Perry Preschool participants **spend 15 times more time with stably married parents before age 18** compared to children of nonparticipants.



### High-quality early childhood education can break the cycle of poverty.

These new findings indicate that high-quality early childhood programs have the potential to lift multiple generations out of poverty. Those treated in Perry were able to build the foundations for stronger family lives that resulted in larger gains for their children, despite living in similar or worse neighborhoods than the untreated families. The children of Perry participants are more educated, healthy, gainfully employed citizens who are more productive members of society.

**Starting earlier can produce greater gains.** The elements and approach of the Perry program continue to inspire high-quality early development programs and supports that begin at birth. The Abecedarian/CARE program modeled after Perry served children from birth to five and produced similar results and a higher return, particularly in the health of recipients and the economic gains of mothers. The highest returns are achieved when investments start at birth—13% for every dollar invested in children who could otherwise not attend a high-quality program. Findings from the study of Perry participants at midlife also show no fadeout in terms of life outcomes, suggesting that success of the program is reflected not by measuring IQ or academic achievement, but by life-course gains in employment, health and other life achievements, as well as the reduction of persistent crime.

**Applications for policymaking.** This research on the Perry Preschoolers is yet further evidence that investing in high-quality early childhood education can produce 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 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.

Sources:

Heckman, James, and Ganesh Karapakula. "The Perry Preschoolers at Late Midlife: A Study in Design-Specific Inference." (2019)

Heckman, James, and Ganesh Karapakula. "Intergenerational and Intragenerational Externalities of the Perry Preschool Project." (2019)



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