

Head Start and Early Head Start - Evidence Based Practice

Positive birth outcomes in pregnant women, development of strong bond relationships between parent and infant/child, significantly improved child health, nutrition, dental, and disability outcomes, improved family functions, improved parenting skills, significant improvements in a broad range of cognitive and socio emotional outcomes. Evidence indicates reduced incidence of child welfare service involvement, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

Extensive longitudinal and “gold standard” (random assignment) research and other studies have provides a massive body of evidence in the effectiveness of Head Start and Early Head Start in improving the lives of children and families.

The Perry Preschool project found that, at age 19, young adults from low income families who had the Head Start experience vs. a randomized control group from the same socio-economic group and community had the following results.

- 61% of the Head Start group passed a functional competency test vs. 38% of the control group.
- 67% of Head Start group graduated from high school vs. 49% of the control group graduated.
- 38% of Head Start group entered post secondary education vs. 21% of the control group.
- 59% of Head Start group were employed vs. 32% of the control group.
- 18% of Head Start group were receiving welfare vs. 32% of the control group.
- 31% of Head Start group were arrested or detained vs. 51% of the control group.
- At age 19 the Head Start group experienced half the pregnancy rate of the control group

Head Start children that have been identified as having special needs spend 48% less time in special education programs in public schools than children without Head Start.

Cognitive Benefits

- Reliable studies have found resoundingly favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and high school graduation rates for Head Start children. [1](#)
- Preliminary results from a randomly selected longitudinal study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that the final grades of Head Start graduates in kindergarten, compared to their non-Head Start peers, were higher in numeracy, language, literacy, social conduct, and physical development. This study also showed that Head Start graduates in kindergarten were absent 4.5 fewer days than their non-Head Start peers. [2](#)
- Head Start children are “ready to learn,” as by the spring of their kindergarten year, they showed substantial increases in word knowledge, letter recognition, math skills, and writing skills in comparison to national norms. [3](#)
- Head Start children in the 2000 cohort of the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) demonstrated a greater increase than the typical child in vocabulary and early writing. [4](#)
- Head Start children are significantly more likely to complete high school and attend college than their siblings who did not attend Head Start. [5](#)
- Recent FACES data show that HS graduates, by the spring of their kindergarten year,

were essentially at national norms in early reading and early writing and were close to meeting national norms in early math and vocabulary knowledge. [6](#)

- By the spring of their kindergarten year, HS graduates' reading assessment scores reached national norms, and their general knowledge assessment scores were close to national norms. [7](#)
- The Head Start Impact Study found statistically significant positive impacts for 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children's literacy skills. [8](#)
- A higher proportion of Head Start parents read to their children more frequently than those parents of children who were not enrolled in Head Start. [9](#)

Health Benefits

- Children in Head Start programs receive significantly more health care screenings than their non-Head Start peers. In addition, the number of dental examinations for Head Start children was higher than the number of those given to non-Head Start children. Head Start provides health and dental services to children and families who might otherwise not have them. [1](#)
- Parents who participate in Head Start are found to have greater quality of life satisfaction; increased confidence in coping skills; and decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and sickness. [2](#)
- Head Start children are at least 8 percentage points more likely to have had their immunizations than those children who did not attend preschool. [3](#)
- A higher proportion of Head Start children received dental care than those children who did not receive Head Start services. [4](#)
- A higher proportion of Head Start parents reported that their 3-year-old children were either in excellent or very good health as compared with those parents who did not have children enrolled in Head Start. [5](#)

Social Benefits

- Head Start children are significantly less likely to have been charged with a crime than their siblings who did not participate in Head Start. [1](#)
- Young women who have experienced a quality early childhood program are one-third less likely to have out-of-wedlock births. [2](#)
- At-risk children not afforded the opportunity to participate in a quality early childhood program are five times more likely to be arrested repeatedly by age 27. [3](#)

Socio-emotional Benefits

- During their program year, Head Start children showed gains in cooperative classroom behavior, reductions in hyperactive behavior, and improvement in other problem behavior. [1](#)
- Head Start has immediate positive effects on children's socio-emotional development, including self-esteem, achievement motivation, and social behavior. [2](#)
- Compared to children in a control group, Head Start children are more likely to avoid serious problems in school as they are less likely to be held back a grade, have better attendance rates, and are less likely to miss standardized tests. [3](#)
- In a comparative study investigating motivation in children, Head Start children were found to have a greater degree of motivation than non Head Start, inner city peers. [4](#)

- The frequency and severity of a child's problem behaviors as reported by their parents were lower for Head Start children than for non-Head Start children. [5](#)

Early Head Start Research:

- Early Head Start children on average had a higher cognitive development score than their control group had. [1](#)
- Early Head Start children demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development than their control group in a number of areas. Compared with their control group, they showed less aggressive behavior and were more attuned to objects as they played. [2](#)
- When their children were 3 years old, Early Head Start parents reported significantly less depression than parents in the control group did. [3](#)
- Early Head Start children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group had. [4](#)
- Early Head Start children at age 3 had larger vocabularies than the control children had. [5](#)
- Early Head Start parents were more supportive of their children in their efforts to develop their language and learning skills than the control group parents were. [6](#)
- Early Head Start parents were more likely to report that they read to their child every day than the control group parents were. [7](#)
- Early Head Start parents appeared to be more emotionally supportive with their children than control group parents were with their children. [8](#)
- Early Head Start parents were more likely to read to their children on a daily basis than the control group parents were. [9](#)
- Early Head Start parents were more likely to participate in an educational or job training program than the control group parents were. [10](#)
- Early Head Start parents were more likely to be employed at some point during the evaluation period than the control group parents were. [11](#)

Economic Benefits

- The preliminary results of a randomly selected longitudinal study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 invested in these Head Start children. These benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education. [1](#)
- Parental involvement contributes to positive growth and upward mobility of Head Start parents. [2](#)
- As adults, those who attended a quality early childhood program are about three times as likely to be homeowners by age 27 compared to those who did not benefit from the program. Home ownership is an indicator of successful adaptation to society. [3](#)

Taxpayer Satisfaction

- Ninety-six percent of parents were satisfied with how Head Start prepares their child for kindergarten. [1](#)
- Most interestingly, the President's Management Council reported that the Head Start program received the highest customer satisfaction score of any government agency and private companies, including Mercedes-Benz and BMW, in an American Customer Satisfaction Index. [2](#)

Source Documents for Research Cited

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