Effective Childrearing of Young School-Aged Children: Evidence from College Enrolled Mothers

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Effective Childrearing of Young School-Aged Children: Evidence from College Enrolled Mothers

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Abstract

A large amount of research relates a mother’s education and child academic achievement, but little has focused on the timing of a mother’s college enrollment. Previous research (Estelle 2011) finds significant gains in children’s reading scores when a mother is enrolled in college during the child’s kindergarten year. The cause of these gains are unknown. This collaborative economic research project focuses on father involvement to determine if the presence of a father figure in the household affects child academic achievement. If so, father involvement also increases during a mother’s enrollment, we would consider fathers to be an important mechanism of the maternal enrollment benefit for children.

Introduction

Research Question: What is the effect of mother’s college enrollment on her child’s academic achievement?

Theory: A mother’s college enrollment might entail:

(+) Less time with child
(+ ) More quality time with child
(+ ) Role model effect
(+ ) Education-friendly home environment
(+ ) Specific human capital

Theory is not enough to produce answers because the net effect on child’s outcomes is unclear. Because of this theoretical ambiguity, it is necessary to use data to test this question.

ECLS-K: Nationally representative survey of 21,000+ students, repeated K-8th grade

Reading Scores Over Time

Anticipated models suggest that parental involvement affects the child’s learning.

Motivation: why focus on fathers?

Child academic gains in light of a mother’s enrollment have shown to be...

1) Strongest when biological father is involved
2) Still significant when there is any type of father figure present in the household
3) Do fathers mediate the maternal enrollment effect?

Methodology

- Exploring literature in economics, psychology, and sociology
- Categorically analyze the literature, formulate a hypothesis based on theoretical connections, and use empirical strategies to test whether father involvement is the key to maternal enrollment gains

Economic perspective on household/family behavior

Households aim to do the best they can with given resources
- Mother and father negotiate household activities—may look different if mother is enrolled in college
- Mother does not make decision to enroll in college randomly... Takes own preferences into account as well
- Father’s availability/abilities may increase the attractiveness of these options

Figural Model

- Child Academic Achievement
- Parental School Involvement
- Parent-Child Interactions
- Home Environment
- Family Characteristics
- School-Teacher Characteristics
- Child Characteristics

Key Variables

Marital status: Married to biological father
Married to non-biological father
Person like father figure in household
Living in marriage-type relationship
Single mother

Father-specific inputs:
- Education level
- Employment status
- Amount of time spent playing with child on weekdays/weekend days

Other Variables Correlated with Family Structure

Parent-child activities
- Music
- Library
- Zoo
- Households discipline:
- Consistent meals
- Consistent bed time
- TV rules
- Alternative childcare:
- Attend regular basis
- Hours per week
- Outside of school activities:
- Organized clubs
- Music/arts lessons
- Performing arts

Data: Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Kindergarten

Our sample: Wave I (Fall ’98 and Spring ’99), limited to biological, college-eligible mother respondents, first-time kindergartners, family income less than $150K, complete data for 4,310 mother-child pairs

Works cited available upon request.