

Atkinson Centre for
Society and Child Development



Determinants of
Early Child Development

Biodevelopmental Processes



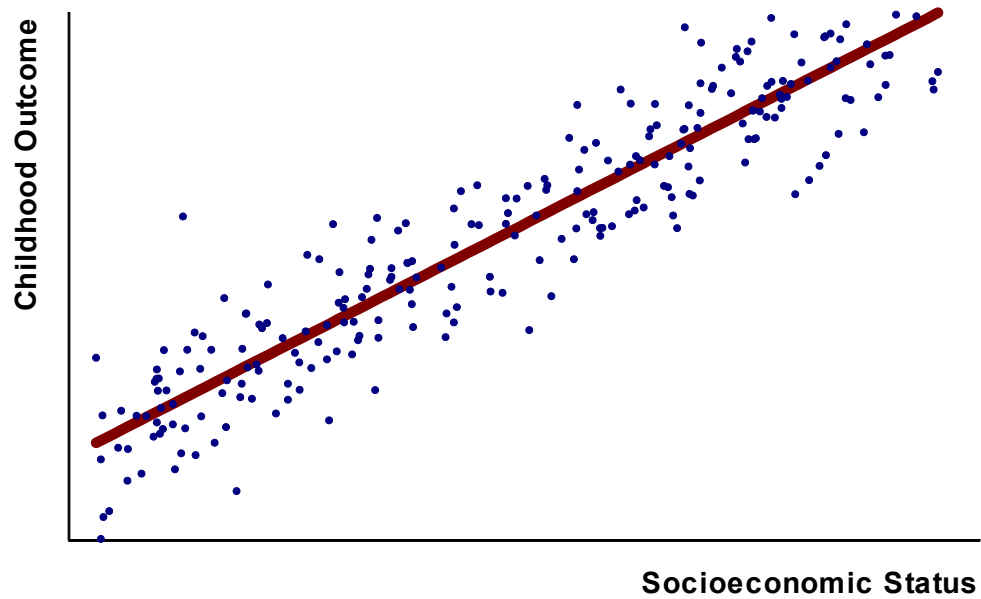
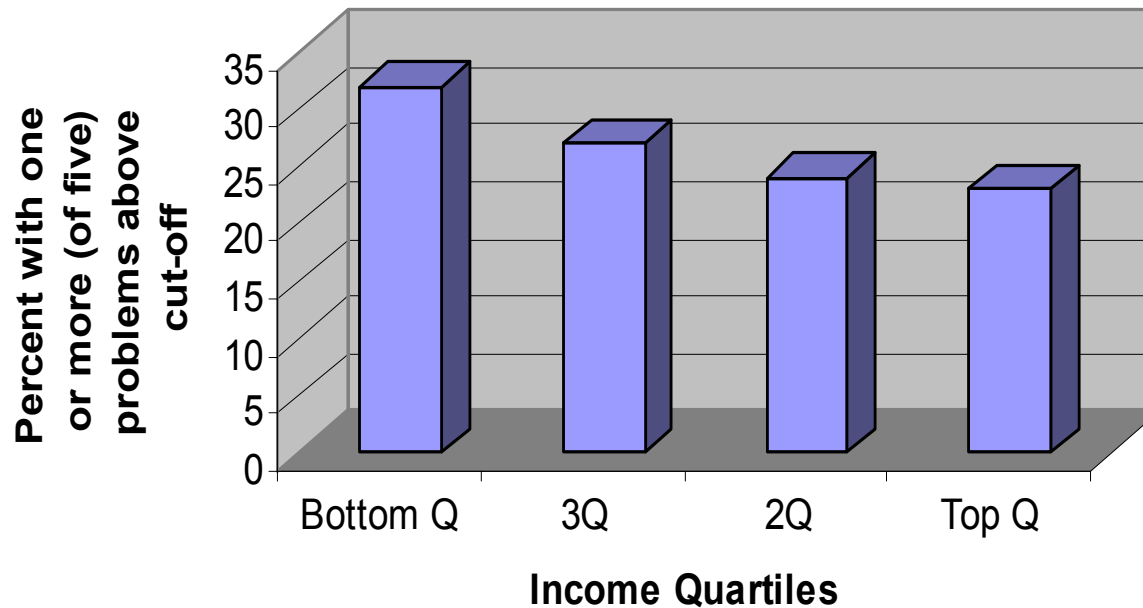


Figure 1. A Socioeconomic Gradient

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Vulnerable Children by Household Income: Canadian NLSCY

(J. D. Willms [ed.], Vulnerable Children, 2002)



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On outcomes from physical and mental health to competence and coping (“*developmental health*”*) we find a similar pattern:

Societies with sharper social status differences have generally lower developmental health.

*Keating & Hertzman, *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations*, 1999, Guilford.

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At least three policy implications:

- 1. Income/wealth disparities**
- 2. Distribution of developmental opportunities and programs**
- 3. Social capital, especially in community connections**

[Boyce & Keating (2004). Should we intervene to improve childhood circumstances? D. Kuh & Y. Ben-Shlomo, A life course approach to chronic disease epidemiology, Oxford U. Press]

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These features point toward a working hypothesis of “biological embedding” in which

- the contexts and experiences of early development are registered in the biology of the individual
- are expressed in various ways across the life course
- that expression is contingent upon contexts and experiences of later life

It is important to draw a sharp distinction between biological embedding and “infant determinism” which holds that early experience = destiny.

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What do we know?

- Out of home child care is a fact of modern life
 - Quality matters
 - Age at initiation and total quantity of time are risk factors
- Parental interactions with children remain pivotal
 - Parents need support in light of societal shifts of mobility, extended family unavailability
 - Parental stress, as in maternal depression, is a major risk factor
- Communities and neighbourhoods are important

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What does it mean for an ECD system?

- Early child care needs to be universally available, of high quality, and affordable.
- Parents, especially in early years, need supports both in work/family conflict (e.g., maternity leave, drop-in centers) and in supports for parenting
- Embedding a unified system (encompassing the above along with integrated referral and services) in the community as an institution of trust is a key.