

Poverty can hurt brain development

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Poverty appears to have dramatic effects on the brain development and function of young children, U.S. researchers said.

A panel at the American Association for the Advancement of Science said children who grow up in environments with "family stress, negative social and environmental characteristics, and little cognitive stimulation" may not fully develop the parts of the brain critical for learning, memory and language, the AAAS said Friday in a release.

Harvard researcher Jack Shonkoff said chemicals released by the body in situations like poverty and violence alter the hippocampus and affect cognition in the brain.

The researchers suggested that encouraging parents to read to their children can help counter the negative effects of poverty early in life.

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