

# Growing years cut short for toddlers from poor families

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Continuous poverty during toddler years can curb the height of children by the time they reach kindergarten, even in industrialized countries, according to new research from the Université de Montréal. Regardless of hereditary factors such as maternal height and education level, according to the finding published in the *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health*, children from poor families are more likely to be shorter than their peers. The study was authored by Zéphyre Ehounoux, a Master's student at the Université de Montréal's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, and directed by Professors Maria-Victoria Zunzunegui, Louise Séguin, Lise Gauvin and researcher Béatrice Nikiema.

"Children from families experiencing a persistent lack of money to cover their basic needs risk facing a growth delay," says Dr. Louise Séguin, noting the possibility holds true after factoring in children's health at birth, sibling rank, maternal health and maternal education. "Children who experienced consistent poverty were more likely to have delayed growth versus children whose basic needs were met."

The researchers used data from the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development, which twice surveyed mothers concerning the height and economic status of their children when their offspring were two-and-a-half and four-years-old. As part of their analysis, Université de Montréal researchers created a novel "poverty measurement" by asking 1,929 mothers if they had been short of income to ensure their children's basic needs: food, housing, heating, clothing, medication and transportation.

"Although Canada is an industrialized country featuring a universal healthcare system and accessible daycare, the country still features health inequalities directly related to poverty," adds Professor Maria-Victoria Zunzunegui, stressing those inequities translate to deficient nutrition, bad housing conditions that can cause breathing illnesses such as asthma that in turn can lead to shorter stature. In addition to these environmental problems, poor children are often exposed to multiple psychosocial adversities. These hardships can lead to chronic stress that can affect their health as well as their growth.

"Our study demonstrates the need for economic policies to support parents with young children so that they have the sufficient economic resources to cover their basic needs in both the short and long term to ensure their normal development," stresses Dr. Séguin.

Source: University of Montreal

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