

In-home parent training levels field for low-income kids

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Home-based interventions that teach parents to engage children in playful interactive learning activities can close the cognitive development gap between disadvantaged children and higher-resource

peers, according to a new study led by UC Merced Professor Jan Wallander.

The study, published this month in the journal *Pediatrics*, included more than 290 [children](#) in India, Pakistan and Zambia whose families received biweekly home visits by trainers from infancy until age 3. Research has shown a link between socioeconomic status and [cognitive development](#), but Wallander's study found that early intervention and training for parents in low-income families all but eliminated that gap.

"These results provide clear proof that simple training for low-income parents can have a significant effect on the cognitive development of their children," Wallander said. "This could have implications for low-income areas of the United State and low-resource countries around the world."

Funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development—part of the National Institutes of Health—the study incorporated an intervention curriculum focused on cognitive, self-help, language and motor skills. Trainers left cards depicting the activities with parents, who were encouraged to apply them in daily life with the child until the next visit.

While children from low-resource families remained behind their high-resource peers in cognitive development at 12 months of age, they had made up that difference by age 3.

Could help lift families out of poverty

The findings are especially promising for areas with limited infrastructure, the researchers claim, because the interventions were held in the home and did not require classrooms or meeting centers.

Carla Bann, statistics and psychometrics fellow at RTI International (formerly the Research Triangle Institute), said that over the long term, such interventions can help lift families out of poverty.

"Children who perform poorly in school are more likely to have low incomes in adulthood, resulting in reduced developmental outcomes for the next generation," Bann said. "We can help break this cycle by training and encouraging parents in low-resource settings to engage their children in a variety of age-appropriate activities."

Wallander is chair of Psychological Sciences at UC Merced and was founding co-director of the university's Health Sciences Research Institute and Resource Center for Community Engaged Scholarship. He said the results of this study could have real implications for the San Joaquin Valley, where many children grow up in families with low resources.

"If we could implement a home visiting program of this type in our communities, our children could develop better language and social skills early on, be better ready when school starts and be more likely to complete high school," Wallander said. "This would better enable them to become healthy and productive adults in our community."

More information: C. M. Bann et al. Home-Based Early Intervention and the Influence of Family Resources on Cognitive Development, *PEDIATRICS* (2016). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2015-3766](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-3766)

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