

Early intervention could boost education levels

22 October 2014, by David Ellis

(Medical Xpress)—Taking steps from an early age to improve childhood education skills could raise overall population levels of academic achievement by as much as 5%, and reduce socioeconomic inequality in education by 15%, according to international research led by the University of Adelaide.

In a study now published in the journal *Child Development*, researchers from the University of Adelaide's School of Population Health and colleagues at the University of Bristol in the UK have modelled the likely outcomes of interventions to improve academic skills in children up to school age. They considered what effect these interventions would have on [education](#) by age 16.

Speaking during Children's Week (18-26 October), lead author Dr Catherine Chittleborough from the University of Adelaide says socioeconomic disadvantage is a known risk factor for education and related outcomes.

"Childhood socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with reduced ability to benefit from schooling, poorer educational outcomes, a lower likelihood of continuing to tertiary education, and less job success. A poor education is associated with increased welfare dependence and lower skilled jobs with lower pay, helping to continue the cycle of disadvantage," Dr Chittleborough says.

"We've known for some time that intervening before the age of five can improve skills necessary for educational success, but the effect of these interventions on socioeconomic inequalities has remained unknown," she says.

Using data of almost 12,000 children from the UK, the researchers found that progressive educational interventions - and more intense interventions for those with greater need - could improve school entry academic skills and later educational outcomes.

"Based on our models, population levels of educational achievement could rise by 5%, and absolute socioeconomic inequality in poor educational achievement could be reduced by 15%," Dr Chittleborough says.

"That is an important finding, especially when you consider that in 2012 there were more than 620,000 pupils aged 15-16 in secondary education in the UK. A 5% improvement in their [educational outcomes](#) means that 13,500 students would be better off. This would then impact on their future employability and their ability to contribute to society economically. I expect we would see similar outcomes on education if we used Australian data."

Dr Chittleborough says pre-school education is extremely important to set children on the right path. "By providing the appropriate educational support, we could make a difference to a lot of children's lives," she says.

More information: Chittleborough, C. R., Mittinty, M. N., Lawlor, D. A. and Lynch, J. W. (2014), Effects of "Simulated Interventions to Improve School Entry Academic Skills on Socioeconomic Inequalities in Educational Achievement." *Child Development*. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12309

Provided by University of Adelaide

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