

# Even a brief experience of poverty enough to harm a children's development

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A one-off experience of poverty is enough to impact on a child's development, according to a new study conducted by sociologists in

Trinity College Dublin.

Parenting stress and reduced ability to invest in healthy activities, such as reading to [young children](#), have been identified by the researchers as the key factors impacting [children](#)'s development.

The study used data for more than 7,000 children from the [Growing Up in Ireland](#) 2008 birth cohort, tracking them at ages 9 months, 3 years, 5 years and 9 years. This covered the period from 2008 to 2017, when the living standards of many Irish families fluctuated with the recession and recovery. Reporting an experience of [poverty](#) at just one of these interviews was classified as "one-off poverty" while those who reported poverty at three or four interviews were in "persistent poverty".

The [research](#) investigated the connections between exposure to poverty in early to middle childhood and children's cognitive and behavioral difficulties assessments at different ages.

Although it is well established that children from poorer families are at a higher risk of educational and behavioral difficulties, this study gives us fresh insights into why this happens.

Mengxuan (Suri) Li, Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Sociology, Provost's Ph.D. Project awardee and the lead author of the study, commented: "We thought that persistent poverty would be the most harmful, but we found that even one spell in poverty negatively impacts on [child development](#), especially if experienced around the age three. This is because falling behind early makes it difficult to catch up later."

Yekaterina Chzhen, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, added: "We also found that behavior problems in [early childhood](#) make it more difficult for children to learn, resulting in a [negative feedback loop](#) over time.

"The study has several policy implications. Poorer families need to be enabled to engage in cognitively stimulating activities with their children. They also need to be supported so that they are less vulnerable to parenting stress. However, instead of interventions targeting poor parents, a more direct approach is to tackle poverty itself through redistributive taxes and benefits, and service provision, according to the authors."

An electronic version of the paper, entitled 'Parental investment or parenting stress? Examining the links between poverty and child development in Ireland', was recently published in a leading European sociological journal *European Societies* ahead of the print edition. The paper can be downloaded from the journal's [website](#).

**More information:** Mengxuan Li et al, Parental investment or parenting stress? Examining the links between poverty and child development in Ireland, *European Societies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2023.2275592](#)

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