



**Understanding
The Early Years**

Creating a Community for Children.



Socioeconomic Factors that Impact Early Childhood Development

Children living in lower-income households often face behavioural and learning challenges when they enter school¹.

After controlling for income and parental education, children's health and behavioural outcomes are unrelated to parental employment; according to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth².

Children with unemployed mothers are more likely to have low receptive vocabulary scores³. This means that they will have more difficulty understanding spoken words.

Unemployed mothers have more time to engage with their child, but are also more likely to experience depression⁴.

In the pre-school years, the level of the mother's education has a more significant role on her child's language development than does the father, but the father's education becomes more important for school achievement after the child enters school⁵.

There are several negative effects of growing up in a single-parent household mostly related to lower incomes and education⁶.

Maternal depression can have adverse effects on mother-child interactions, resulting in reduced social and cognitive developmental outcomes⁷.

¹ Red Deer Understanding the Early Years Project (2009). *Understanding the early years in Red Deer, Alberta: A community research report*.

² The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth is a comprehensive, longitudinal survey designed to measure and track the well-being and life experiences of Canada's children and youth as they grow up. It has been collected every two years since 1994. The Survey is conducted by Statistics Canada and sponsored by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

³ Brownell, M. & Willms, J. D. (2008). Early predictors of childhood outcomes at school entry. A paper in the HRSDC series, *Successful Transitions*. Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

⁴ Dahinten, V. S. & Willms, J. D. (2002). Maternal depression and childhood vulnerability. In J. D. Willms (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (pp. 211-228). Edmonton, AB: The University of Alberta Press.

⁵ Willms, J. D. (2002). Socioeconomic gradients for childhood vulnerability. In J. D. Willms (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (pp. 71-102). Edmonton, AB: The University of Alberta Press.

⁶ Strohschein, L., Tramonte, L. & Willms, J. D. (2009). The effects of divorce and separation on children's developmental outcomes. Research monograph in the *Successful Transitions* series. Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Social Development Canada.



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Four factors are strongly related to children's developmental outcomes: (1) parenting skills, (2) the cohesiveness of the family unit, (3) the mental health of the mother, and (4) the extent to which parents engage with their children⁸.

Red Deer UEY results found that low income families and single-parent families are more likely to be experiencing poor family functioning. Family functioning is related to children's developmental outcomes, especially children's behaviour⁹

Exposure to high-quality child care programs greatly impacts early childhood outcomes¹⁰, especially for children from low socioeconomic households¹¹.

⁷ Murray, L. & Cooper, P. (1997). Effects of postnatal depression on infant development. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 72(2), 99-101.

⁸ Willms, J. D. (2002). Research findings bearing on Canadian Social Policy. In J. D. Willms, (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth* (pp.331-358). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

⁹ Racine, Y. & Boyle, M. H. (2002). Family functioning and children's behaviour problems. In J. D. Willms, (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth* (pp. 199-210). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

¹⁰ Currie, J. (2001). Early childhood education programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 15, 213-238.

Schweinhart, L. J. & Weikart, D. P. (1997). The high/scope preschool curriculum comparison study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(2), 117-43.

Shonkoff, J. & Phillips (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

¹¹ Burchinal, M. R., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Bryant, D. M. & Clifford, R. M. (2000). Children's social and cognitive development and child care quality: Testing for differential associations related to poverty, gender or ethnicity. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4(3), 149-165.

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