

First-Year Maternal Employment and Child Outcomes: Differences Across Racial and Ethnic Groups

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Abstract

We use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine associations between first-year maternal employment and child outcomes for 3-year-old white, Black, and Hispanic children. We find that first-year maternal employment is associated with lower vocabulary scores for white, but not Black or Hispanic, children and with elevated levels of aggressive behavior problems for Hispanic, but not white or Black, children. Factors such as the timing and intensity of employment, family structure, and maternal education sometimes moderate these associations, but do not explain differences across racial and ethnic groups. Child care and parenting behaviors do not appear to mediate associations between first-year maternal employment and children's outcomes and cannot explain racial and ethnic differences in these associations.