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Early child outcomes and parental resources in four English-speaking countries

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Abstract

How does the association between parental resources and early child outcomes differ across the US, UK, Canada and Australia? Are these patterns associated with the different policy and economic environments in the four countries? This paper will address these issues using survey data on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of children aged 4 to 5.

Though there is much communality in the cultural, economic and social welfare systems of these four countries, there are some important differences. The US relies more heavily than the other countries on the private market for early childhood care, education and health care. Though the policy environments of the UK, Canada and Australia are more similar to each other there are still significant differences between these three countries in the relative mix of resources devoted to cash support and different types of service provision to families with young children.

The paper will use data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort in the US, the Millennium Cohort Study in the UK, the National Longitudinal Survey of Canadian Youth and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. Parental resources will be measured using parental education and income. Child outcomes will be measured using a number of cognitive and non-cognitive outcome indicators. Cognitive measures include the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), the Who Am I school readiness score and similar measures. Non-cognitive measures include the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and descriptive behaviour items. Though there are many overlaps in the data items covered in the surveys, measurement differences between the surveys are unavoidable. Addressing these will be a major focus of the paper. These methods will include measurement modelling for the outcome and parental resource variables (particularly income), and undertaking sensitivity analysis when we are unable achieve full harmonisation.