



Child Development in Uruguay: a longitudinal analysis of socio- economic gaps and parenting practices



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Abstract

Early **childhood development** gaps emerge early in life, leading to inequalities and perpetuating poverty. Despite the importance of understanding the dynamics of these gaps, panel data is typically scarce for an in-depth study of this issue. **This study examines the trajectories of cognitive and socio-emotional development gaps in early childhood in Uruguay.** Analyzing longitudinal data from a national survey, we find that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds exhibit more behavioral problems, and cognitive gaps widen from age three, narrowing later but never fully closing. High levels of parental interaction correlate with better cognitive outcomes, highlighting the need for policies that support early parental engagement.

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1. Background

The first years of life are crucial for determining individuals' future human capital (Black et al. 2017; 2021). Child development is a cumulative process that involves progressions in cognitive, language, motor, socio-emotional, and self-regulation skills (Sameroff 2009).¹ Gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD) emerge very early in life, and they can explain inequalities later in life (IDB, 2024). Socioeconomic status (SES) gaps in early childhood development restrict social mobility and perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Children from poorer households are at risk of facing multiple adversities, such as food insecurity, family stress, less play material, violent discipline, and lower quality of adult-child interactions, which can explain lower productivity in the life cycle, reinforcing the inter-generational transmission of poverty (Black et al. 2017).

Several studies have documented disparities in child development outcomes by SES (proxied usually as income or maternal education) both globally (Fernald et al. 2013; Fernald et al. 2012) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (Abufhele et al. 2020; Attanasio et al. 2023; Reynolds 2022; Schady et al. 2015). Attanasio et al. 2023 find that socio-emotional gaps emerge early in various LAC countries.

Parenting practices are one of the potential drivers explaining gradients in child development. Warm environments and responsive, nurturing, and supportive interactions during early childhood are foundational for cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes. However, the home and other care environments do not always offer adequate conditions or learning opportunities required for development (IDB 2024).

¹Cognitive skills refer to children's ability to think and explore, including language learning, symbolic play, counting, problem-solving, decision-making, among others. These skills are an important input for successful lifetime outcomes (Hanushek and Woessmann 2008). For example, cognitive scores prior to elementary school are associated with cognitive scores during school years (Von Stumm and Plomin 2015; Duncan et al. 2007). Social competence refers to abilities to interact with others, including peer relations, team-work, problem-solving, and compliance to groups (Papadopoulou et al. 2014). The emotional domain includes emotion recognition, expressiveness, and communication, the capacity to self-regulate, and frustration tolerance (Denham 2007).

Uruguay offers a unique opportunity to explore this issue because of the availability of longitudinal data. The Uruguayan Survey of Nutrition, Child Development, and Health (ENDIS) was launched in 2013 to gather nationwide data for a comprehensive study on early childhood. It examines socioeconomic conditions, child development, and parenting practices. This data helps shape public policies for young children and serves as the country's inaugural demographic and health survey. ENDIS marks Uruguay's pioneering effort in early childhood studies, being the country's first and Latin America's third (following Chile's ELPI and Colombia's ELCA) to utilize a panel methodology in a nationwide household survey.

Previous studies indicate the presence of SES disparities in child development in Uruguay. Regarding child development levels, findings from the ENDIS 2018 survey indicate that 13% of children aged 1 to 5 years were at risk of delay in some domain of their development with a specific concern highlighted for socio-emotional development, affecting 16% of children (ENDIS, 2018). Furthermore, cross-sectional analysis shows that gaps in child development by socioeconomic status are small and insignificant at early stages of life, but they grow with age and are significant at 26 months (Attanasio et al. 2023).

Moreover, the closure of early childhood services during the Covid-19 pandemic caused losses of between 0.13 and 0.27 standard deviations (SD) in children's cognitive, motor development, behavior, and attitude to learning, with greater impacts in quintiles 2 and 3. These losses were smaller or nonsignificant among children from high SES schools in language and mathematics skills. When comparing the results of the 2013 and 2018 cohort of the ENDIS we find an increase in emotional and behavioral problems, particularly in children belonging to households in the lowest income quintiles. Data from ENDIS 2018 shows that internalizing and externalizing problems decrease with income although in the case of externalizing behavior, the gaps are more noticeable when comparing the extreme income quintiles (González et al. 2022).

Many previous studies find that parenting practices are also key: using longitudinal data from two waves of ENDIS 2013, Failache & Katzkowicz (2019) report that spending time on stimulation activities with children improves communication, fine motor, and problem-solving performances.

They also find better results in cases where joint decision-making is visualized in the home. In Uruguayan households from the poorest income quintile, at least 1.80 negative practices are observed, while these are 1.14 in the richest households (Lopez Boo et al. 2018). Concerning parenting styles, using the same data (Perazzo et al. 2019) report a bidirectional relationship between parenting styles that frequently use punishment and children's externalizing problems. The authors also found a negative effect of authoritarian styles on internalizing problems.²

In this note, we will examine two primary questions: First, what are the trajectories over age of the SES gaps in cognition and socio-emotional domains of early childhood development? Second, do parental involvement gaps in these domains of child development exist, what are their trajectories, and what do these results imply for policy?

²There are other distal determinants of child development not fully explored in this note, but are worth mentioning. Household structure, for instance, influences the quality of the stimulation environment and can also shape development in the first years of life. Ceni et al. (2023) find that the entry of a new household member generates negative effects in the child's externalizing and internalizing problems, with this relationship being more noticeable in households with a low educational level. This is somewhat in line with the results of the first cohort of ENDIS 2013, which showed a higher prevalence of this type of problems when the household size is larger (GEF, 2015). The study also shows that the long-lasting absence of the father has an impact on externalization problems.

2. Data

We use data from the second and third rounds of the Uruguayan Survey of Nutrition, Child Development, and Health (ENDIS). This is a nationally representative sample of Uruguayan children who were 0 to 3 years old in 2013. In this study, we use the second and third waves (2016 & 2019), given that socio-emotional, and cognitive measures are only available nationally in these waves. In these rounds, the children were between 2.0-6.5 and 5-11.5 years old, respectively. Our final sample comprised 1584 children (out of a total of 2611); these are the children for whom we have complete information on socioemotional development and cognitive abilities in both waves.

3. Child development instruments and main explanatory variables

3.1 Socio-emotional development (2016 and 2019): the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL) is a well-validated, reliable, parent-completed checklist consisting of 100 items assessing a range of problem behaviors divided into two main subscales: externalizing and internalizing (Achenbach and Rescorla 2000; Alvarez-Nuñez et al. 2020). The ENDIS collected the first 99 items as the last one was an open question. The externalizing scale approaches aggressive behavior and attention problems, while the internalizing scale includes four subscales reflecting internal distress (emotionally reactive, anxious/depressed, somatic symptoms and withdrawn). These items have three rating scales (0= Not true -that you know-; 1= Somewhat, sometimes; 2= Very true or true often). Higher scores are interpreted as a higher likelihood of behavioral issues. We examine the raw total score reported for both subscales.

3.2 Cognitive measures

- 2016: the Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3rd edition (ASQ-3) uses parent self-reporting to evaluate the risk of developmental delay in children from 2 to 66 months using 21 age-specific questionnaires that shift according to age-expected milestones (e.g. 0-2 months, 3-4, etc.). It measures a child's performance in five areas: gross motor, fine motor, communication, problem-solving and social skills. We used only questions associated with the communication and problem-solving subscales. Each questionnaire includes 30 questions organized in the five areas mentioned above. Each item has a response scale of three values (No= 0, Not yet= 5, Yes= 10). The total score for each area is obtained by adding up all its items. Higher scores suggest higher levels of development. The scores were standardized within each age group and the percentiles of the distribution were used as outcomes.
- 2019: we consider The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), an intelligence test that measures a child's intellectual ability. ENDIS collects measures for 5 cognitive domains: finding similarities, matrices, digit-spans (sequenced, backward, and ordered) and figure weights. The WISC test scores were also age-standardized.

3.3 SES variable (2016). Socioeconomic status is measured by household income which is the sum of the income (wage and non-wage) of all its members, reported by the caregiver in the survey. Two types of households are defined according to reported income: those with income above the median of the distribution of this variable (high SES), and those in the lower half of the distribution (low SES).

3.4 Parenting interactions (2016). We create a composite score in which we classify "high interaction" to be that the child participates in four activities with adults in the household for which all must be affirmative to be considered interactive. Activities include teaching games, singing songs, storytelling, and playing with toys. This data refers to the pre-elementary school period.

4. Descriptive statistics: characterization of the sample by SES

We explore summary statistics in Table 1 for low SES and high SES groups. As expected, in low SES households: mothers had their children at earlier ages and - in spite of a lower percentage with the biological father in the household - have a larger household size. The sample is balanced for sex and age.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of households according to income group

Summary Statistics (2016)	Low SES	High SES	Difference (p-value)
Socio-Emotional Score - # of Externalizing Problems	5,521 (0,151)	4,182 (0,123)	0,000
Socio-Emotional Score - # of Internalizing Problems	3,652 (0,101)	2,607 (0,082)	0,000
Cognitive score - percentile	45,410 (1,029)	549,44 (0,988)	0,000
High Parental Interaction	0,521 (0,018)	0,684 (0,017)	0,000
Age in months	51,476 (0,394)	51,433 (0,383)	0,938
Male	0,524 (0,018)	0,500 (0,018)	0,340
Mother's age	35,951 (0,391)	38,744 (0,326)	0,000
Mother's age at first birth	23,936 (0,391)	27,542 (0,366)	0,000
Household Size	4,605 (0,061)	4,407 (0,057)	0,017
Biological Father is in the Household	0,641 (0,017)	0,859 (0,012)	0,000
Baseline household income	26,532 (436,589)	107,482 (2758,817)	0,000
Number of observations	792	792	

Fuente: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

Regarding the stimulation environment, in 2016 68% of children in high SES households experienced high parental interaction while 52% of children in low SES households did. By age, we see that younger children receive higher parental interaction than older children (figure not reported, available upon request).

5. Methodology: capturing the nonlinear relationship between age and child development

To answer the research questions of this study, we make use of the longitudinal nature of our data, and we estimate the following equations:

$$Y_{i,a}^k = \sum_{s=1}^3 f^s(a_i)SES_{H,i} + \sum_{s=1}^3 f^s(a_i)SES_{L,i} + \epsilon_{i,a}^k$$

Where $Y_{i,a}^k$ is developmental level for a domain k , analyzed for child i , at age a , with high (SES_H) or low (SES_L) socioeconomic status.

The functions f^s are polynomials of degree s . So, for each child development test, the data of each group (Low SES and High SES) is fitted to a polynomial of degree 3 in age. We choose a 3rd degree because it simplifies the data but still allows for some variation in slope over time, as may happen with sensitive periods of child development. We plot estimated means and their 95% confidence for each group by age. Fitting a third-degree polynomial to the child's age attempts to find the curve that best represents how a child's development progresses as they get older.

We use the estimated coefficients of these regressions to estimate the mean outcome (and the 95% confidence interval) for each Socioeconomic group over the age range. These results, presented in the figures in the next sections, help us to analyze how wealth differences affect cognitive and socio-emotional development during the early years of people's lives.

As one of the main advantages of the ENDIS is that it follows the same children over time, we can discard possible measurement errors due to the change of the sample composition from one round to the next. In other words, we rule out the possibility of our results being driven by differences in shocks experienced by children of different cohorts.

Note, however, that we have data on each child only at two points in time (e.g. when they were 3 years old in 2016 and 6 in 2019). The figures we present in the following section must be interpreted taking this into account.

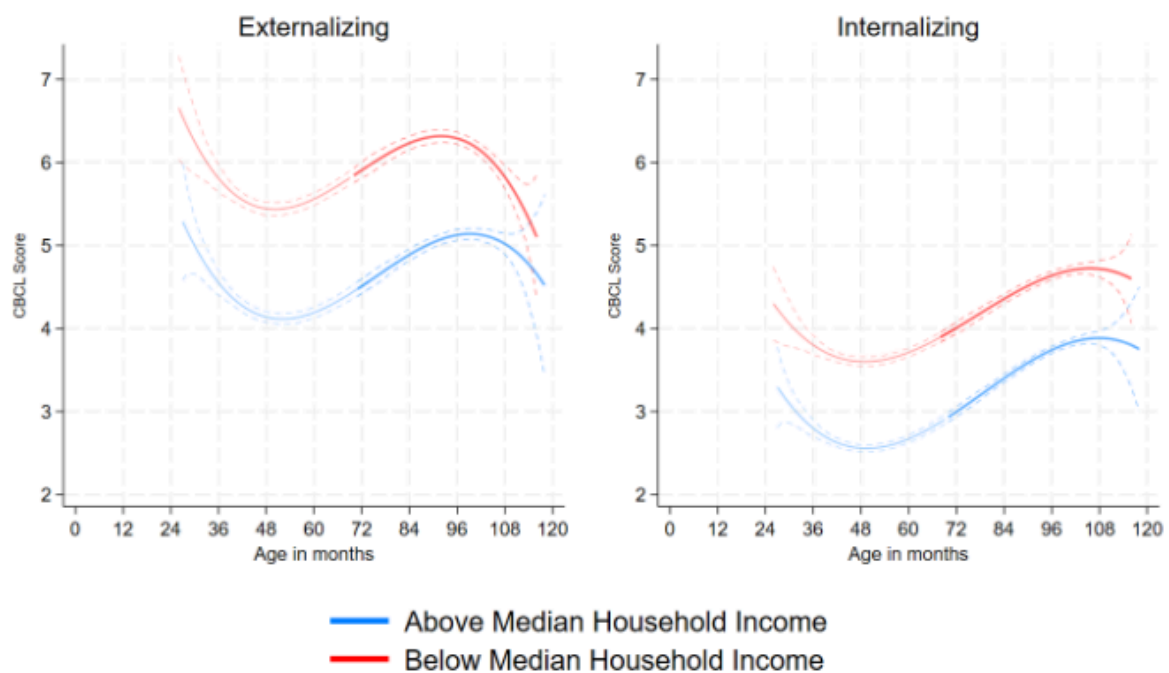
6. Results

Our results uncover four characteristics of the child's skill formation process for the Uruguayan case.

6.1 Children from Low SES have more behavioral problems than children of High SES. Only in externalizing problems this gap appears to narrow but does not close completely.

Younger children from low SES backgrounds have scores in externalizing problems that are approximately 1.5 higher than those of children from high SES backgrounds. This gap narrows as children approach 10 years old but does not close completely. The gap in internalizing problems scores is around 1 point and, while it narrows slightly with age, it remains almost as large at age 10 as at age 3. This confirms the findings of Attanasio, et al. (2023), which show that in the Uruguayan case, when comparing the highest and lowest SES quartiles, the differences in internalizing problems observed at age 3 are of similar magnitude at age 10.

Figure 1. Socioemotional development over age by SES



Socioemotional development is measured with the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL). The vertical axis shows the raw CBCL score. Higher scores correspond to lower levels of socioemotional development. The strongest hues/thickest lines correspond to data from 2019. 1584 children. 2 observations per child. N Below Median Household Income = 792. N Above Median Household Income = 792. Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise. Source: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

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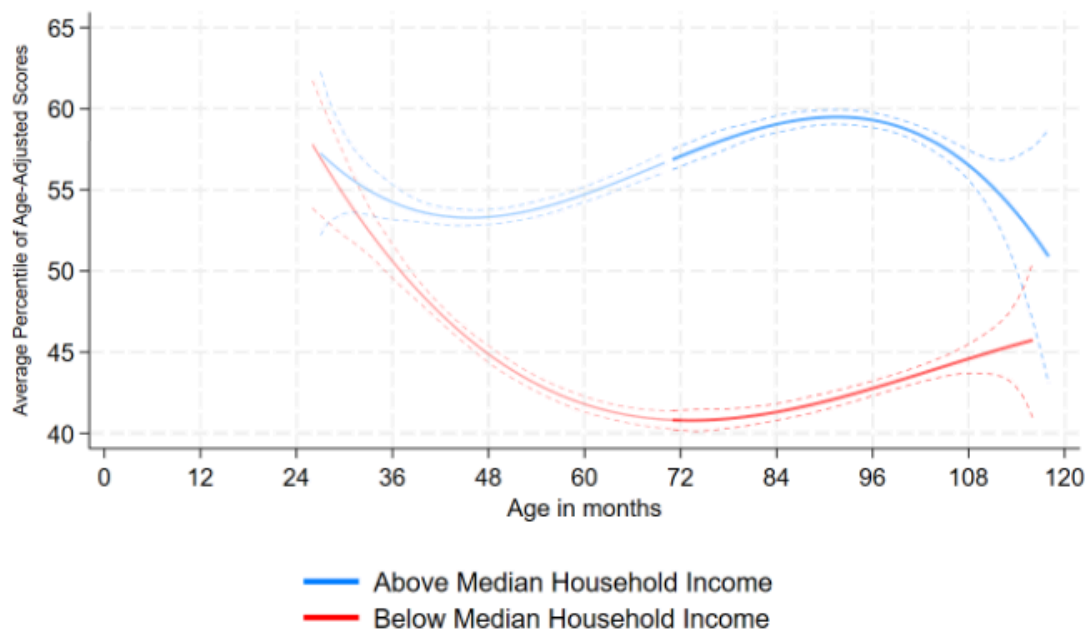
Source: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

6.2 At early ages, differences in cognitive skills according to SES do not stand out. However, around age three, the gap in cognition starts to grow considerably and persists throughout the following years, narrowing towards the end of the analyzed age range but without being completely closed.

Cognitive scores follow a different pattern, with smaller differences found when comparing the youngest children above and below the median income using the ASQ-3 test. As shown in Figure 2, there are no detectable differences in children under 3 years old. In line with our results, Uruguayan children from the lowest income quartile do not have significant differences in cognition until they are 26 months old compared to those from the highest income quartile, according to Attanasio, et al. (2023). However, as they get older, a gap appears, grows considerably, and then narrows around 8 years of age but does not close completely.

One caveat to this conclusion is that the two tests (ASQ-3 and WISC) used in the 2016 and 2019 survey rounds are different. Longitudinal analysis is challenging because children grow, and earlier tests may not be relevant to their advanced abilities at older ages. A second caveat is that at the tails of the age distribution, we have fewer observations, which leads to wider confidence intervals and lower statistical power, making it difficult to reach more robust results.

Figure 2. Cognitive skills over age by SES



Cognitive skills are measured with the ASQ-3 problem-solving module (round 2) and WISC (round 3). The vertical axis shows the score percentile for each month of age. The strongest hues/thickest lines correspond to data from 2019. 1584 children. 2 observations per child. N Below Median Household Income = 792. N Above Median Household Income = 792. Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise. Source: Encuesta Nacional de Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

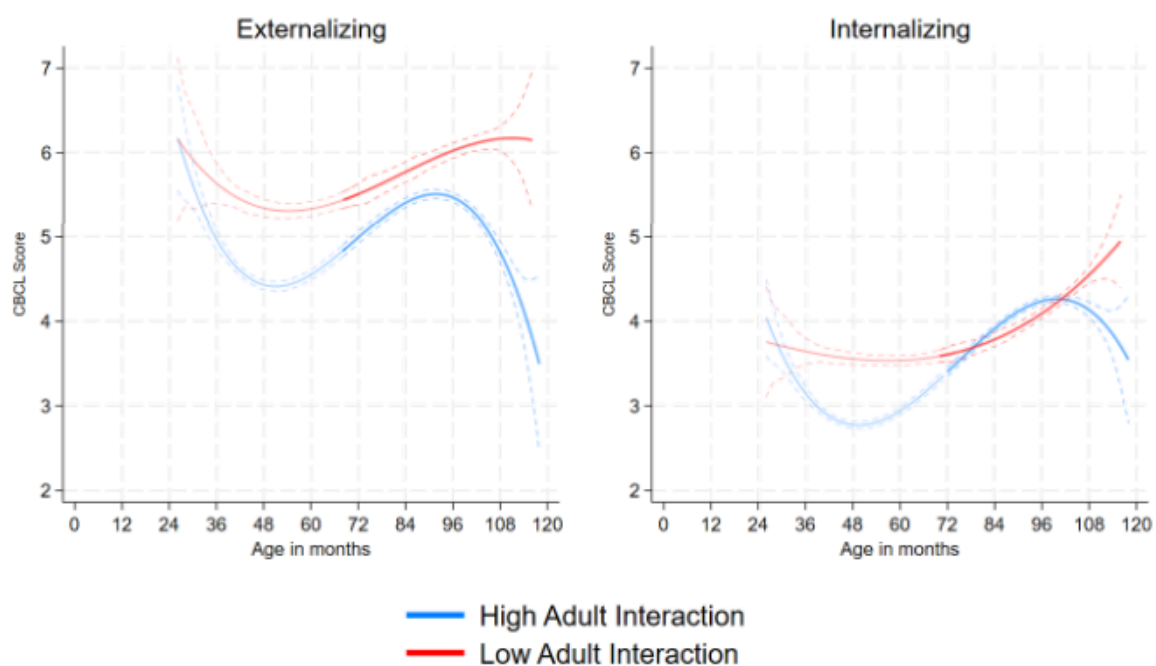
Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise.

Source: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

6.3 Children experiencing lower levels of parental interaction have more behavioral problems.

Externalizing and internalizing problems show an upward trend from around 48 months onwards in both the high and low interaction groups. However, while in the former a drop is observed towards more advanced age groups, in the latter there is no reversal of this trend but an increase, particularly regarding the internalizing domain. Towards 10 years of age, the gaps according to interaction levels persist.

Figure 3. Socioemotional development by high or low parenting interactions



Socioemotional development is measured with the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL). The vertical axis shows the raw CBCL score. Higher scores correspond to lower levels of socioemotional development. The strongest hues/thickest lines correspond to data from 2019. 1584 children. 2 observations per child. N Below Median Household Income = 792. N Above Median Household Income = 792. Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise. Source: Encuesta Nacional de Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

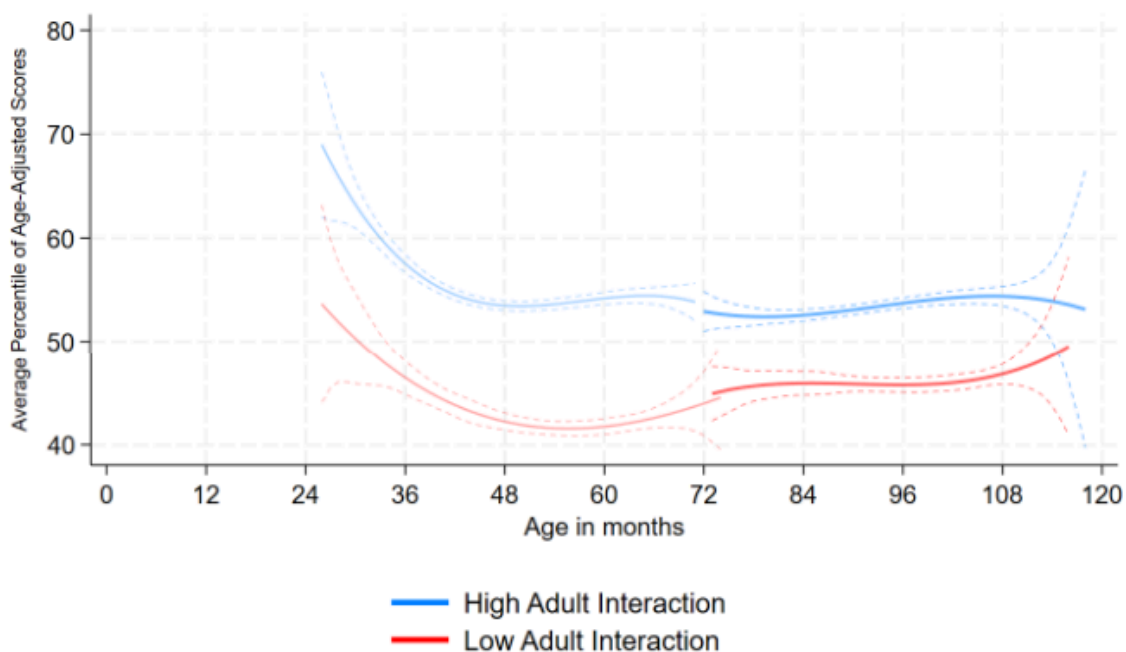
Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise.

Source: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

6.4 Children experiencing higher levels of parental interaction have higher cognitive scores and this difference persists at least until elementary school.

The gaps in cognition according to the level of parental interaction do not show signs of clear convergence. They are somewhat smaller towards older ages but do not close. These gaps contrast with those found according to income. While the cognitive gap between children with high and low interaction is larger for the youngest children, it is smaller for younger children between SES backgrounds. This is in line with research indicating that stimulation in the early years is essential for cerebral processes. Though the gaps narrow with age, again, they do not close completely and remain even larger than they were in the income analysis. This mirrors evidence that early parental interaction is crucial to long-term success.

Figure 4. Cognitive skills by high or low parenting interactions



Cognitive skills are measured with the ASQ-3 problem-solving module (round 2) and WISC (round 3). The vertical axis shows the score percentile for each month of age. The strongest hues/thickest lines correspond to data from 2019. 1584 children. 2 observations per child. N Below Median Adult Interaction = 792. N Above Median Adult Interaction = 792. Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise. Source: Encuesta Nacional de Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

Note: In some cases, the data is sparse at the tails of the age distribution, which makes the estimation less precise.

Source: Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud (ENDIS) Uruguay.

Previous results on parental interaction are not driven by income being correlated with parental interaction.

To ensure that income was not driving the parental interaction gaps in child development, we first predicted the children's scores after regressing them on household income (and a cubic in age). Adding these residuals to the population's mean score gave us the child development outcome without the component associated with income. When we repeated the graph analysis, the results were comparable.

7. Final Remarks and Policy Recommendations

Public Policy Recommendations

The findings of this report confirm the importance of promoting early interventions that reach families on time, even before the child is born. This timing is critical from a public policy cost-effectiveness perspective because acting during the most sensitive period of brain development has a greater return on investment than interventions that attempt to remediate effects resulting from exposure to prolonged periods of inadequate stimulation. In Uruguay, the infantilization of poverty is a persistent phenomenon. According to the latest data from the Continuous Household Survey (ECH 2023), 20% of children live under the poverty line, and our results suggest that children from the bottom of the income distribution perform worse in terms of cognitive development and behavioral problems.

Responses to these issues should be comprehensive, as the disparities in children's development by socioeconomic status are multidimensional. Children growing up in poverty have limited access to good nutrition and hygiene, live in homes with poor living conditions and are located in areas with problems of security, transportation, and access to quality education and care. The nationally representative Continuous Household Survey (ECH) reveals that, in 2018, 79% of 2-year-olds and 95% of 3-year-olds from the highest income quintile attended a care center. For children from the lowest income

quintile, the attendance rates were 40% and 61%, respectively (Gómez, et al., 2018).

Integrate cash transfer programs with early childhood interventions to attach both poverty reduction and ECD goals.

According to data from the first wave of the ENDIS 2013 (GEF, 2015), the incidence of single-parent households in the first income quintile is twice that of the general level. Poverty tends to be more prevalent in this type of household, especially those headed by women and with children under the age of 4 (MIDES, 2020). In this sense, cash transfers to this kind of household are tools that widen access to economic resources, alleviate the financial burden of households and widen the range of options available to parents when investing in health, food, hygiene, and care for their children. However, the observed gaps will not be reduced if only these types of policies aimed at transferring economic resources to families are targeted, as this greater availability of resources does not always translate into quality investments and improvements in child development (Conti and Heckman, 2012). Cash transfers in Uruguay should be complementary to comprehensive policies aimed at strengthening other dimensions such as parenting practices that directly affect child development and, as the findings of this note show, explain the gaps in children's performance that prevail even up to elementary school. Fernald et al. (2017) show that a parenting support program based on a group methodology in Mexico ("Educación Inicial") has effects on child development when combined with the usual cash transfer infrastructure in the country. When the two programs operate independently, the effects disappear.

Increase coverage of parenting programs, like PAF.

Poverty and insufficient psychosocial stimulations in the home can affect child development, but timely interventions can revert this trend (Shonkoff, Slopen, and Williams 2021; Gertler et al. 2021; Heckman, Pinto, and Savelyev 2013).

In Uruguay, the program "Programa de Acompañamiento Familiar (PAF)" of Uruguay Crece Contigo has been operating since 2012, targeting households in situations of social or health risk where pregnant women or children under the age of four live. Based on a strategy of home visits, the program aims to strengthen parenting practices, promote appropriate child stimulation, and

improve access to social services and programs, such as cash transfers, employment, and housing improvement programs, among others. Marroig et al. (2017), report positive effects of this program on children's nutritional status and development and access to cash transfers. Since 2022, Uruguay Crece Contigo has been implementing a pilot program of teleassistance and messaging in early childhood, which aims to work with families who are on the waiting list to receive home accompaniment. The messaging component is based on the previous successful experience of Crianza Positiva in early childhood centers in Uruguay. The program seeks to take advantage of mobile technology to send messages that promote the strengthening of parenting practices by addressing the most common parenting behavioral biases. Bloomfield et al. (2022) document positive effects of this initiative on parental involvement and the quality of caregiver investments. Also within the orbit of the Ministry of Social Development in 2022, the program “Programa de Acción Familiar” was created for families living in extreme poverty and where children and adolescents live. It is critical to strengthen these initiatives to increase coverage and then analyze the effects of large-scale interventions.

Strengthening institutional coordination, increasing funding, and empowering stakeholders to make early childhood a national policy are mechanisms that can strengthen the way toward a better scalability of early childhood programs.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Chile Crece Contigo program experience can provide guidance in this regard. The program has stable public funding and a strong commitment from the government. According to data from the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEEd), in 2022 Uruguay allocated to preschool and early childhood education approximately 0.60% of its GDP. This figure is lower than the one in Chile (0.8% in 2020³) and, especially than the one in the Nordic countries (1.3% in 2019⁴), which are the leading investors in this area. Although public funds allocated to early childhood have been increasing, the challenges in this area are clear considering that public investment is key to compensate for the low private investment by households. Investment for children under 5 years of age in quintile 5 is four times higher than that of those in quintile 1. The largest difference is due to private resources, which are more than 7 times higher in the quintile 5 (Terra and Rossel, 2022).

3 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024).

4 <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecd-family-database.html>

Improving design and cost-effectiveness of parenting programs to improve child development and reduce socioeconomic gaps.

Parenting programs have the potential to improve child development and reduce socioeconomic gaps, which, as we have shown in this technical note, arise since the early years and do not seem to narrow down over time. Recent evidence shows that these programs are likely to improve the home environment and increase overall household investment in children by expanding access to play material and more dedicated caregiver-child time. Most vulnerable families are prone to benefit more from these interventions.

For parenting programs to be effective on a large scale, they need sufficient dosage, high take-up rates, intervention fidelity, and strong local leadership (IDB, 2024). Evaluations of at-scale programs in Brazil (Programa Cresça com seu Filho), Peru (Cuna Más), and Nicaragua (Programa de Acompañamiento a la Política de Primera Infancia) presented issues with lower-than-intended take-up rates and intervention dosage. Common challenges include high family-to-facilitator ratios, staff turnover, and logistical difficulties. Ensuring a structured curriculum and adequate training for facilitators is crucial. High-quality home visits, supported by proper training and mentoring, significantly benefit ECD. Political support and local leadership are essential for the successful implementation of home-visit programs. Recent rigorous studies of at-scale programs implemented in LAC show that, when these programs are successful, they offer high cost-benefit ratios, even if the impacts are relatively low in absolute terms (Araujo, Dormal, and Rubio-Codina 2019; Araujo, Rubio-Codina, and Schady 2021; Lopez Boo, Leer, and Akito 2023; Lopez Boo, Ferro, and Carneiro 2023).

As additional options to consider, group-based approaches and remote or hybrid modalities for delivering interventions show promise, being more cost-effective and fostering peer support compared to individual home visits. Recent adaptations of the Reach Up intervention for small groups of six to eight women have yielded positive results. Group sessions, involving multiple caregiver-child pairs, are less expensive and encourage the adoption of new practices (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2020; Hamadani et al. 2019).

Final Remarks

Our findings confirm the income gaps in socio-emotional and cognitive development already documented in Uruguay. This study is unique in its longitudinal nature, following the same children from early to middle childhood. This is crucial for confirming that the disparities are not artifacts of varying trends across cohorts, as might be the case with cross-sectional data. The data show that income gaps persist, although they appear to narrow for cognitive and externalizing problems among school-age children.

Additionally, we demonstrate the persistence of gaps in child development related to parental stimulation during early childhood. Children whose parents engage in more types of activities with them have better developmental outcomes, even into elementary school. These gaps did not narrow to the same degree as the income-related ones, underscoring the importance of early stimulation for setting a child on a successful developmental trajectory.

Finally, we propose a set of actions for policymakers to consider to reduce these gaps, improve human capital levels, and help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

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