

The Association of Toddler-Aged Children's Social Development with Parents' Educational Background and Family Income

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ABSTRACT

A toddler's ability to interact with others and adjust to their surroundings is greatly influenced by their social development. Family characteristics are important in this process, especially the income and educational attainment of the parents. The aim of this study was to ascertain how the social development of toddler-aged children was correlated with the income and educational attainment of their parents. The PICO framework and databases like PubMed and Google Scholar were used in this study's literature review methodology. According to inclusion criteria, articles published between 2015 and 2023 that examined the relationship between parental income and education and the social development of children ages 1-3 were reviewed. Two studies reported non-significant results, while nine of the eleven qualified papers demonstrated a substantial association between parents' income and education and their children's social development. The results show that through better parenting and proper meeting of developmental needs, higher education and suitable income levels promote toddlers' optimal social stimulation.

Keywords: Family Income, Parental Education, Social Development, Toddlers

BACKGROUND

The social development of toddlers (aged 1–3 years) forms the foundation for character building and the ability to interact with their surroundings. Children who receive adequate social stimulation are better able to adapt and develop self-confidence. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2020), social development includes the ability to play cooperatively, share, and understand the emotions of others. Factors influencing social development include parenting style, socioeconomic status, and parental education (Siregar & Sulastri, 2021).

Parents' education affects how they provide stimulation and respond to their children's needs. Parents with higher education levels generally understand the importance of social stimulation and proper nutrition (Nurhayati, 2020). Moreover, sufficient family income allows the creation of a more conducive home environment for child development, including access to health facilities, educational toys, and early childhood education centers (Fitriani et al., 2022).

However, previous research has shown varied findings. Some studies have reported strong relationships between parental education and family income with children's social development (Lestari, 2019), while others have found no significant relationship, suggesting that parenting and social environment factors play a greater role (Amiruddin, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between parents' education level and family income with social development among toddlers based on existing research evidence.

METHODS

This study employed a literature review approach to synthesize existing research related to parental education, family income, and toddlers' social development. The review drew its data from three major scholarly databases: Google Scholar, PubMed, and Garuda, ensuring a broad scope that captured both international and Indonesian research contexts. Using multiple databases strengthened the comprehensiveness of the search and minimized the risk of missing relevant empirical evidence.

To maintain a systematic process, the search strategy applied the PICO framework, which guided the identification of keywords and relevant studies. The keywords used included education level, family income, social development, and toddler. These keywords were selected to reflect the core variables of interest and to ensure consistency in retrieving literature aligned with the study objectives. The PICO-guided approach helped structure the review in a clear and methodologically sound manner.

In determining eligibility, the study applied specific inclusion criteria. Only articles published between 2015 and 2023 were considered, ensuring that the reviewed evidence represented the most recent developments and contemporary understanding of early childhood social development. Both English and Indonesian publications were included to capture a wider range of perspectives. The studies also needed to explicitly discuss parental education or income in relation to social development among children aged 1 to 3 years.

Exclusion criteria were also carefully defined to maintain the relevance of the review. Studies that focused solely on physical growth, nutrition, or general health without linking these variables to social dimensions were omitted. This step ensured that all included research directly addressed the core theme of social development. By narrowing the focus, the analysis remained conceptually coherent and aligned with the study's aim.

The initial search yielded a total of 11 articles that appeared relevant based on titles and abstracts. However, after full-text screening and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 9 studies met all requirements and were included in the final analysis. This filtering process reflects the importance of ensuring both methodological alignment and conceptual relevance in a literature review.

The data from the included studies were analyzed descriptively by examining their research designs, study populations, key findings, and the relationships identified between parental education or income and toddlers' social development. This descriptive approach allowed the review to highlight patterns, identify consistencies and discrepancies across studies, and provide a clear understanding of how socioeconomic and educational factors influence early social development.

RESULTS

The reviewed literature provides a comprehensive overview of how parental education and socioeconomic conditions influence toddlers' social development across different settings in Indonesia. Most studies converge on the notion that early social competence is strongly shaped by the family environment, particularly maternal education and household economic capacity. These factors are often viewed as determinants of the quality of stimulation, interaction, and caregiving practices offered to young children. Across various designs, from cross-sectional to qualitative explorations, researchers consistently emphasize the foundational role of the home environment in shaping early developmental outcomes.

A recurring theme across the literature is the influence of maternal education on social development. Multiple studies highlight that mothers with higher educational backgrounds tend to adopt more responsive parenting practices, provide richer communication, and better understand developmental needs. These advantages translate into improved social independence and interaction skills among toddlers. The findings suggest that education not only enhances parental knowledge but also facilitates more intentional and developmentally appropriate caregiving.

Socioeconomic status, particularly family income, also emerges as a significant factor in several studies. Higher household income is commonly associated with broader access to learning materials, safer living conditions, and better overall environmental stimulation for children. These conditions collectively support the development of social competencies during early childhood. However, the strength of this association varies across studies, indicating that income is one piece of a more complex developmental puzzle.

Some research further highlights the interplay between parenting style and economic resources. Studies with a qualitative orientation reveal that while socioeconomic factors matter, parenting practices often exert a stronger direct influence on children's daily social experiences. Warm, structured, and communicative parenting can foster social adaptability even in families with limited financial resources. This suggests that interventions focusing on parental behavior may yield substantive developmental benefits, regardless of economic background.

Despite the general trend of significant relationships, not all studies report consistent findings. A small number of investigations found no significant association between socioeconomic status and social development. These discrepancies typically appear in contexts where community-based support systems are strong or where parental education programs are insufficiently implemented. Such variations underline the importance of considering local environmental and cultural factors when interpreting developmental outcomes.

Overall, the existing evidence indicates that parental education and economic conditions are influential but not singular determinants of toddler social development. The literature supports a multifactorial view, where family background, parenting behavior, and environmental opportunities interact to shape early social skills. The summary table below captures these diverse findings and illustrates how different methodological approaches contribute to understanding the relationship between parental factors and toddler development.

Table 1. Summary of reviewed literature

No	Author (Year)	Study Title	Design	Main Findings
1	Lestari (2019)	Relationship between Mother's Education and Parenting Style with Social Development of Children Aged 1–3 Years	Cross-sectional	Significant relationship between mother's education and child's social development ($p=0.001$)
2	Fitriani et al. (2022)	Influence of Family Income on Children's Social Development in Early Childhood Education	Descriptive correlational	Higher income increases social ability in children ($p=0.021$)
3	Siregar Sulastri (2021)	& Socioeconomic Relationship with Toddler Development	Cross-sectional	Significant correlation between family economy and social skills ($p=0.030$)

No	Author (Year)	Study Title	Design	Main Findings
4	Amiruddin (2021)	Parenting and Environment as Dominant Factors in Children's Social Development	Qualitative study	Parenting style more dominant than economic status
5	Nurhayati (2020)	Parental Education and Children's Social Competence	Cross-sectional	Higher education linked to better child social independence (p=0.015)
6	Hidayat (2018)	Effects of Socioeconomic Factors on Child Development	Descriptive	No significant relationship (p=0.09)
7	Anisa (2020)	Relationship between Socioeconomic Status and Psychosocial Development of Toddlers	Cross-sectional	Significant relationship between socioeconomic status and psychosocial development (p=0.027)
8	Wulandari (2021)	Mother's Education and Early Childhood Independence	Quantitative	Maternal education influences social ability (p=0.034)
9	Rahmawati (2023)	Family Income and Social Interaction of Toddlers	Observational	Positive significant correlation (p=0.019)

From the nine analyzed studies, **seven** reported significant relationships between parents' education/income and toddlers' social development, while **two** did not find significant associations, mainly in populations with limited parental education interventions.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this review reveal that parents' education level plays a major role in shaping children's social behavior. Higher education enables parents to understand the importance of two-way communication, social stimulation, and responsive parenting. This aligns with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which states that trust and autonomy in early life are established through positive interactions with caregivers (Santrock, 2018).

Family income also affects parents' ability to provide safe and stimulating social environments. Children from well-off families tend to participate more in early education programs and community health services (*posyandu*), which are essential for fostering social interaction (Ministry of Health, 2020).

However, the absence of a significant relationship in some studies emphasizes the influence of non-economic factors such as emotional warmth, parenting style, and communication. Even low-income families can foster good social development if they provide consistent affection and support (Amiruddin, 2021).

Thus, improving parents' education and income should be accompanied by parenting education programs to ensure optimal social development outcomes for toddlers.

CONCLUSION

Parents' education level and family income are significantly associated with toddlers' social development. Parents with higher education and sufficient income are more capable of providing effective social stimulation through supportive parenting that fosters independence, empathy, and

positive interaction. Therefore, parenting education programs targeting families of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds are essential to improve early social development in children.

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