How child social and emotional competence impacts well-being as an adult

Findings from a 20-Year Study on the Outcomes of Children Screened in Kindergarten
BACKGROUND
Mounting evidence that early skills matter
Conventional wisdom:
Early skills in same domain impact future outcomes in same domain

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Early academic skills predict later college and career success
- Early behavior problems predict crime outcomes
Evidence that social and emotional development matters, but didn’t know how much or for how long.
No one knew the age when predictions could be made
20 years ago
Four research sites

Seattle, WA
Central PA
Nashville, TN
Durham, NC
Student demographics
753 students total

Sex
- Male: 58%
- Female: 42%

Race
- European American: 50%
- African American: 46%
- Other: 4%

- 58% Male
- 42% Female
- 50% European American
- 46% African American
- 4% Other
Measured prosocial skills

1. Resolves peer problems on his/her own
2. Very good at understanding other people’s feelings
3. Shares materials with others
4. Cooperates with peers without prompting
5. Is helpful to others
6. Listens to others’ point of view
7. Can give suggestions and opinions without being bossy
8. Acts friendly toward others
Focused on control group

received no intervention

received help
WHAT HAPPENED IN 20 YEARS
What we looked at:

- Official records
- Reports from parents
- Self-reporting from the participants
What we learned:

For every one-point increase in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she was:
What we learned:

For every one-point increase in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she was:

2X as likely to attain a college degree in early adulthood
What we learned:

For every one-point increase in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she was:

54% more likely to earn a high school diploma.
What we learned:

For every one-point increase in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she was:

46% more likely to have a full-time job at the age of 25
What we learned:

For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:
What we learned:

For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

54% higher chance of having negative interactions with the police.
What we learned:

For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

64% higher chance of having spent time in juvenile detention
What we learned:
For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

67% higher chance of having been arrested by early adulthood
What we learned:
For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

52% higher rate of recent binge drinking
What we learned:

For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

82% higher rate of recent marijuana usage
What we learned:

For every one-point decrease in a child’s social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

82% high chance of being in or on a waiting list for public housing
What we learned:
Social competence more consistently predicted all outcomes when compared to other factors.

Prosocial skills > race
family income
gender
aggressive behavior
academic readiness
Why would these skills matter so much?

Cascade Effect
THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND
This study doesn’t prove causality on its own
When combined with other research, the pattern points to causality.
These are the traits that make sense to measure in kindergarten.
Social and emotional skills can be learned
Should we screen more kids?
Should we expand programs that work?
What does this mean for the return on early investment?
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