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Relations between the Home and Cognitive Development in Nicaraguan Children

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Abstract

Early childhood home environments are well understood to be foundational for cognitive development, yet their relationship to specific cognitive skills is challenging to understand empirically in low resourced nations, leading to lack of clarity about the roles of socialization versus maturation. We examine the contributions of environmental context on culturally adapted versions of executive functioning (EF; inhibitory control), expressive language, and reasoning tasks (spatial and relational reasoning) in a representative sample of 1,834 children (24-59 month-olds) in Nicaragua. Multivariate regressions revealed children with highly structured homes and enrollment in early education in this context exhibited higher EF, expressive language and reasoning skills, explaining cognitive skills better than socioeconomic status. These results suggest these cognitive skills are malleable and impacted by the home context. Language and reasoning skills were also related to more social partners, suggesting language and reasoning are more tied to social interaction than EF.