



**Intergenerational transmission of income inequality:
What do we know?**

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This issue includes a summary of work that was presented at the Institute for Research on Poverty’s “Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty: Research on the Early Years of Life” conference held at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in April of 2016. IRP faculty affiliates Jason Fletcher, Katherine Magnuson, and Barbara Wolfe co-organized the event, and attendees included researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Presenters represented a variety of disciplines, including sociology, economics, psychology, education, public health, and social work. Funding for the conference was provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

The conference focused on how family poverty during the first years of life shapes children’s life chances, with attention to both mechanisms of transmission as well as the programs and policies that may be effective in reducing the effects of poverty on early development. The speakers in the conference also touched on the consequences of exposure to many of the disadvantages low-income children face, including child maltreatment, homes with lower levels of cognitive stimulation, violent neighborhoods, and toxins and pollutants.

The topic was timely; research has shown that economic resources and parental investments are increasing for economically advantaged children and youth, while their disadvantaged counterparts experience comparatively fewer investments. Segregation and separation across multiple institutions limit opportunity for the disadvantaged and create further opportunity for the advantaged, thus generating further inequality. The divergence of opportunity for low-income and more affluent groups is both the result of growing income inequality and a likely

cause of future inequality. It may also profoundly affect the life chances of low-income children.

Public policies invest considerable resources in poor families and children with the goal of compensating for early disadvantages. The debate about the costs and benefits of these programs should consider the extent to which they protect vulnerable children from potential harmful developmental effects of poverty, as the long-term consequences are likely important for future inequality and productivity. The work presented in this issue provides information important to this discussion.

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The purpose of *Focus* is to provide coverage of poverty-related research, events, and issues, and to acquaint a large audience with the work of the Institute by means of short essays on selected pieces of research. Full texts of Discussion Papers and Special Reports are available on the IRP Web site.

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