Abstract

Childhood behavioral skills are strong predictors of adult socio-economic success, but little is known about how to improve these social skills, in particular among children the most at risk of poor adult outcomes. We use data from a long-term randomized evaluation of a childhood social skills training program in Montreal to answer this question. We match detailed data on behavior from adolescence with administrative criminal and educational records and self-reported socio-economic outcomes. As adults, the subjects in the treated group are about 30% less likely to have a criminal record, 50% more likely to have a secondary diploma, are 16% more likely to be active fulltime in either work or school during ages 17-26, and 68% more likely to have ever belonged to a civic or social group. We distinguish the different potential channels through which this intervention operates, and present evidence that self-control and social trust are potentially important channels. One possibility is that these behavioral changes in early adolescence (ages 10-13) lead to improvements in school outcomes in later adolescence (ages 14-17), which in turn lead to improved adult outcomes. Using conservative assumptions in a simple framework, we estimate overall rate of return of this program in terms of increased wages is 450%, implying that every $1 invested yields $4.5 in benefits.