Developmental outcome in preschoolers:
Interrelations among maternal depression, perceived social support, and
child’s age of entry into Head Start

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Abstract 
This study tested a mediated-moderator model that was developed to explore whether age of 
entry into a Head Start Program moderated the relationship between maternal depressive 
symptomology and child cognitive and social outcome. In addition, the mediating role of 
maternal social support was examined. The study sample included 43 low-income mothers and 
their pre-school aged children who were enrolled in a large Head Start program in Southwest 
Virginia. Maternal depressive symptomology was measured using the CES-D and perceived 
social support was measured using the Perceived Social Support Scale (PSS). Child cognitive 
data included scores on two working memory tasks and the PPVT. Child social outcomes were 
assessed using the Social Skills Scale and the Classroom Conduct Scale developed for use with 
Head Start Populations. Results of the study did not support a moderating role for age of entry to 
Head Start. Level of maternal education was found to predict both child working memory skill 
and receptive language ability, and high levels of maternal depressive symptomology were found 
to predict child social skills. In addition, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine gender 
differences in the relations between variables when girls and boys were analyzed separately. A 
significant interaction effect was found for gender and maternal education in predicting 
preschool receptive language ability. Preliminary data suggests that boys may be more highly 
impacted by maternal factors than are girls. Policy implications and directions for future 
research are discussed.
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