

Study: Words make an economic difference

By NPR

In the early 1990s, a team of researchers decided to follow about 40 volunteer families – some poor, some middle class, some rich – during the first three years of their new children’s lives. Every month, the researchers recorded an hour of sound from the families’ homes. Later in the lab, the team listened back and painstakingly tallied up the total number of words spoken in each household.

What they found came to be known as the “word gap.”

It turned out, by the age of 3, children born into low-income families heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers.

Research since then has revealed that the “word gap” factors into a compounding achievement gap between the poor and the better-off in school and life.

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