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Outcome from a Prospective, Longitudinal Study of Prenatal Cocaine Use: Preschool Development at 3 Years of Age

Marylou Behnke, MD¹, Fonda Davis Eyler, PhD¹,
Tamara Duckworth Warner, PhD¹, Cynthia Wilson Garvan, PhD²,
Wei Hou, MS² and Kathleen Wobie, MA¹

¹ Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida College of Medicine, and ² Department of Statistics, University of Florida College of Medicine

All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marylou Behnke, Department of Pediatrics, PO Box 100296, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32610. E-mail: behnkem@peds.ufl.edu.

Objective To determine the effects of prenatal cocaine exposure on child development. **Methods** This prospective, longitudinal study recruited 154 pregnant cocaine users who were matched on race, parity, socioeconomic status, and perinatal risk to 154 noncocaine users. Drug use status was determined by maternal history and urine screening. At 3 years of age, the child subjects were assessed by an evaluator blinded to maternal drug use history. During a home visit at age 3, caregiver, family, and home assessments were administered. **Results** Structural equation modeling showed a direct effect of the amount of prenatal cocaine exposure on the adjusted birth head circumference which in turn directly affected preschool development. **Conclusions** We could not demonstrate a direct effect of prenatal cocaine exposure on preschool development, a result that is consistent with that of earlier work and now extending findings to age 3. However, cocaine continued to exert an indirect effect on development through its direct effect on the head circumference at birth.

Key words: prenatal cocaine use; preschool development; structural equation modeling.

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