



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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Study Finds Effects of Early Child Care at Age 15

If you thought that the quality of the child care your toddler got wouldn't matter when he or she was a teenager, think again. A new longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children has found that it does matter, more than a decade after the children have transitioned from child care to elementary school.

The study, the first to document long-term effects of routine, nonrelative care in a large sample of children from economically diverse families, extends the findings of previous research on the topic.

The research represents the latest installment of the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, which was carried out under the auspices of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The study appears in the May/June 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers sought to determine if early child care quality, quantity, and type predict children's achievement and behavior problems at age 15. They looked at children born in 10 cities across the United States from the children's birth in 1991 until they turned 15, measuring quality, hours, and type of care during the early years; collecting results of standardized tests of achievement; and obtaining reports from teens, their families, and their schools. The children were from diverse backgrounds, including middle-class as well as low-income homes and two-parent as well as single-parent families.

The study found that the effects of early child care at age 15, while small, are comparable in size to those previously observed in early childhood and elementary school. Specifically, teens who attended programs with higher-quality care during early childhood scored higher on tests of cognitive and academic achievement than teens who attended programs with lower-quality care. Furthermore, teens who spent more hours in early child care during the first 4-and-a-half years of their lives reported more risk-taking and greater impulsivity than teens who spent fewer hours in care.

The researchers also found that teens who participated in higher-quality child care programs had fewer behavior problems than teens who had attended poor quality child care. The measure of behavior problems included rule breaking, arguing, and hanging out with peers who get into trouble as well as feeling sad and lonely.

"This evidence of long-term effects of early child care quality is noteworthy because it occurred in a large economically and geographically diverse group of children who took part in routine nonrelative child care in their communities," notes Deborah Lowe Vandell, Professor and Chair of Education at the University of California, Irvine, who is the lead author of the report.

“These findings suggest that the quality of early child care experiences can have long-lasting, albeit small effects on middle-class and affluent children, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged.”

The study was supported by NICHD and the members of the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 81, Issue 3, *Do Effects of Early Child Care Extend to Age 15 Years? Results From the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development* by Vandell, DL (University of California, Irvine), Belsky, J (Birkbeck University of London), Burchinal, M (University of California, Irvine), Steinberg, L (Temple University), Vandergrift, N (Duke University), and the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. Copyright 2010 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.