

Study shows benefits from early daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Parents who sometimes feel guilty sending their kids to daycare every day might be heartened by a new study that finds that kids who go to a high-quality daycare can see academic benefits that last into high school.

The findings come from a long-running U.S. government study that finds that children in high-quality child care score slightly higher on measures of academic and cognitive achievement as teenagers.

They were also slightly less likely to act out than peers who were in lower-quality child care, the researchers reported. But kids who spent the most hours in child care each week had a slightly greater tendency toward impulsiveness and risk-taking at age 15 than teens who had spent less time in child care.

The findings are presented in the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers note that the study was not designed to determine cause and effect, and the results don't prove whether a given aspect of the child care experience had a particular effect. They note that there are plenty of other factors that were not measured in the study that could be involved.

For the study, Deborah Lowe Vandell, the chair of education at the University of California, Irvine, led a team who tracked 1,364 children from diverse backgrounds who have been studied since they were one month old starting in 1991.

They gathered information on the quality, hours and type of daycare. High-quality care was characterized by the caregivers who were warm and supportive, and offered the children lots of cognitive stimulation. Then they collected results of standardized tests, and then interviewed the teens, their families and their schools.

About 90 per cent spent at least some time in the care of someone other than a parent before the age of four. More than 40 per cent of the children received high-quality care.

The team found that at age 15, kids who had been in higher-quality care scored higher on tests of cognitive and academic achievement than peers in lower-quality care.

"High quality child care appears to provide a small boost to academic performance, perhaps by fostering the early acquisition of school readiness skills," said James A. Griffin, deputy chief of the NICHD Child Development & Behavior Branch.

They also found that youth who had spent more time in quality child care as young children reported fewer acting-out behavior problems

as teenagers.

"These results underscore the importance of interaction between children and their daytime caregivers," said Vandell. "We're seeing enduring effects of the quality of staff-child interaction."

The gain was comparable to what had been observed earlier among kindergarten-bound 4-1/2-year-olds in high-quality care. That suggests that the advantage that kids from daycare have upon entering kindergarten carries with them carrying with them.

Vandell called it "a small boost, but a boost nonetheless."

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