

Benefits of high quality child care persist 30 years later ^[1]

Author: Science Newsline - Psychology

Source: Science Newsline

Format: Article

Publication Date: 19 Jan 2012

EXCERPTS:

Adults who participated in a high quality early childhood education program in the 1970s are still benefiting from their early experiences in a variety of ways, according to a new study.

The study provides new data from the long-running, highly regarded Abecedarian Project, which is led by the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Researchers have followed participants from early childhood through adolescence and young adulthood, generating a comprehensive and rare set of longitudinal data.

According to the latest study of adults at age 30, Abecedarian Project participants had significantly more years of education than peers who were part of a control group. They were also four times more likely to have earned college degrees; 23 percent of participants graduated from a four-year college or university compared to only 6 percent of the control group.

The findings were published online Wednesday (Jan. 18) in the journal *Developmental Psychology*.

Elizabeth Pungello, Ph.D., scientist at the FPG Institute and co-author of the study, said the educational attainment findings were especially noteworthy.

"When we previously revisited them as young adults at age 21, we found that the children who had received the early educational intervention were more likely to go to college; now we know they were also more likely to make it all the way through and graduate," Pungello said. "What's more, this achievement applied to both boys and girls, an important finding given the current low rate of college graduation for minority males in our country."

Other benefits included that Abecedarian Project participants were more likely to have been consistently employed (75 percent had worked full time for at least 16 of the previous 24 months, compared to 53 percent of the control group) and less likely to have used public assistance (only 4 percent received benefits for at least 10 percent of the previous seven years, compared to 20 percent of the control group). They also showed a tendency to delay parenthood by almost two years compared to the control group. Project participants also appeared to have done better in relation to several other social and economic measures (including higher incomes), but those results were not statistically significant.

Of the 111 infants originally enrolled in the project (98 percent of whom were African-American), 101 took part in the age 30 follow-up.

"Being able to follow this study sample over so many years has been a privilege," said Frances Campbell, Ph.D., senior scientist at the institute and lead author of the study. "The randomized design of the study gives us confidence in saying that the benefits we saw at age 30 were associated with an early childhood educational experience."

Craig Ramey, Ph.D., professor and distinguished research scholar at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute and study co-author, said the findings have powerful implications for public policy.

"I believe that the pattern of results over the first 30 years of life provides a clearer than ever scientific understanding of how early childhood education can be an important contributor to academic achievement and social competence in adulthood," Ramey said. "The next major challenge is to provide high quality early childhood education to all the children who need it and who can benefit from it."

The Abecedarian Project was a carefully controlled scientific study of the potential benefits of early childhood education for children from low-income families who were at risk of developmental delays or academic failure. Participants attended a full-time child care facility that operated year-round, from infancy until they entered kindergarten. Throughout their early years, the children were provided with educational activities designed to support their language, cognitive, social and emotional development. Follow-up studies have consistently shown that children who received early educational intervention did better academically, culminating in their having greater chance of adult educational attainment.

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