

# Experts question contentious study on outcomes in Quebec's daycare program <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Child-care advocates and researchers say a new study suggesting negative outcomes for children in Quebec's daycare system makes too many leaps in its conclusions and may misrepresent the real picture.

The study suggested children who go through Quebec's low-cost, child-care system may do well academically, but have worse outcomes when it comes to health, life satisfaction and crime rates compared with their counterparts in other provinces who don't have access to the same type of program.

Child-care researchers who have looked at the Quebec model point to what they believe are flaws in how the study arrived at its conclusions. They say the authors link child care to the behavioural outcomes of all children in the province, even though at least half of them weren't in the low-cost daycare program.

"They took everybody in Quebec. So these results can be driven by those who didn't go to child care. We can't say it's child care," said Christa Japel, a developmental psychologist and professor at the University of Quebec at Montreal who has studied the quality of child care in Quebec.

"If half of the kids weren't in child care ... can we say that child care is associated with these quite insignificant increases on the behavioural scales?"

The study posted online Monday marked the second time the researchers tried to measure the quality of the Quebec daycare system and the second time they stoked controversy with their results.

Complicating matters this time is that the study landed in the midst of a federal campaign in which the NDP has made creation of a national child-care program on the Quebec model central to its election hopes.

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair has strongly promoted his plan to eventually spend \$5 billion a year to subsidize one million existing or new spaces that would cost parents no more than \$15 a day.

Mulcair often points to Quebec, where parents pay up to \$20 a day, as the model he wants to export to the rest of the country, using an economic argument to sell his plan.

Research from economist Pierre Fortin from the University of Quebec at Montreal has shown the Quebec program helped grow the provincial economy, increased women's workforce participation and employment rates, and boosted income tax and consumption tax revenues flowing to provincial and federal coffers. Work by Fortin

and others suggests government recoups between \$1.50 and \$3 for every dollar invested in child care in Quebec.

There still remain problems with quality in subsidized spaces in the province, Japel said and there are similar issues in other child-care settings such as home daycares, for-profit centres and informal daycare arrangements.

Quebec children in subsidized daycare in the province have had an "overall quite positive" experience, Japel said.

Martha Friendly, director of the Toronto-based Child Resource and Research Unit, which leads national studies on child care, said the researchers took large data sets on child outcomes from Statistics Canada, and then connected them to crime statistics without controlling for the fact that only half the children in the Quebec had a daycare space.

Such an analysis would have worked if every child in the province had been part of the daycare program. Instead, the findings magnified trends in other parts of the country, she said.

"There's no explanation of why they got these findings that were so different than other studies," Friendly said. "The question was, are you

comparing apples and oranges?"

-reprinted from CBC News

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** federal programs <sup>[4]</sup>  
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