

Child care services, socioeconomic inequalities, and academic performance ^[1]

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Full report PDF ^[2]

Objective

To determine if child-care services (CCS) at a population level can reduce social abstract inequalities in academic performance until early adolescence.

Methods

A 12-year population-based prospective cohort study of families with a newborn (n = 1269). Two CCS variables were estimated: "intensity" (low, moderate, and high number of hours) and "center-based CCS type" (early onset, late onset, and never exposed to center-based CCS).

Results

Children from low socioeconomic status (SES) families who received high-intensity CCS (any type), compared with those who received low-intensity CCS, had significantly better reading (standardized effect size [ES] = 0.37), writing (ES = 0.37), and mathematics (ES = 0.46) scores. Children from low-SES families who received center-based CCS, compared with those who never attended center care, had significantly better reading (ES_{early onset} = 0.68; ES_{late onset} = 0.37), writing (ES_{early onset} = 0.79), and mathematics (ES_{early onset} = 0.66; ES_{late onset} = 0.39) scores. Furthermore, early participation in center-based CCS eliminated the differences between children of low and adequate SES on all 3 examinations (ES = -0.01, 0.13, and -0.02 for reading, writing, and mathematics, respectively). These results were obtained while controlling for a wide range of child and family variables from birth to school entry.

Conclusions

Child care services (any type) can reduce the social inequalities in academic performance up to early adolescence, while early participation in center-based CCS can eliminate this inequality. CCS use, especially early participation in center-based CCS, should be strongly encouraged for children growing up in a low-SES family.

Region: Quebec ^[3]

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