

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

Pediatrics December 2015, Volume 136 / Issue 6

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Source: Pediatrics

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Dec 2015

AVAILABILITY

Full article PDF ^[2]

Abstract

Objective: To determine if child-care services (CCS) at a population level can reduce social 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]

Tags: child development ^[4]

inequality ^[5]

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