High-Quality Child Care as an Effective Antipoverty Strategy: Emerging Evidence From Canada

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In their article, “Child Care Attendance and Educational and Economic Outcomes in Adulthood,” Domond et al. confirm extant literature revealing the lifelong impact of high-quality early care and education participation. Specifically, 2 seminal early intervention studies conducted in the United States, the HighScope Perry Preschool Program2 and the Carolina Abecedarian study,3 have revealed the academic, social, economic, and health benefits of early childhood education, especially for children placed at risk primarily because of poverty. These studies, which were based on a small sample of primarily African American children in specific communities, make it challenging to generalize the findings, and the lack of rigorous examination of the core components makes it difficult to replicate. The current study extends and expands our current knowledge about the impact of regulated early care and education, specifically child care, on children’s education attainment and economic stability.

Of particular note is the overwhelming benefit of regulated child care to boys, especially those who enter care in infancy. Authors of other studies have noted the biological and social vulnerability of boys in the early years. The distinct neurobiology of boys in utero and for the first 2 years of life may make them susceptible to later problems, especially under conditions of environmental stress. Furthermore, there is evidence that boys and girls start life with different capabilities and emotional skill sets because of sex-specific genetic and environmental factors. For example, infant boys and girls display different responses to postpartum maternal depression, negatively impacting boys’ later outcomes.7 Similarly, boys also show different sensitivity to quality of parenting and attachment, with boys likely to exhibit problem behaviors in preschool and beyond when experiencing insensitive and disorganized attachment with their primary caregiver.7 Regulated child care may provide a nurturing and protective environment for boys that sets them on the right track for school and life success, as indicated by lower likelihood of not being poor as adults compared with those who did not participate in regulated child care. This is important especially in light of the concern about male school disengagement, graduation rates, contact with the criminal justice system, and economic stability, especially for African American male individuals in the United States.

Most importantly, the finding that participation in regulated child care is associated with lower likelihood of not being poor as an adult provides us with at least one antipoverty strategy. Poverty is associated with a multitude of poor functioning and outcomes from birth through adulthood; thus, there is a greater need for policies that combat poverty at the population level starting in childhood. Unfortunately, this study is unable to inform us as to whether...
regulated child care is particularly effective for children placed at risk primarily because of poverty or whether it closes the school and economic gap between children from low-income compared with higher-income households. There is evidence that high-quality early education may be more beneficial for children from low-wealth households compared with those from more advantaged households. Although the authors of this study provide evidence that child care participation is linked to a lower likelihood of not being poor; there is a need to examine the extent to which child care is associated with economic stability and wealth generation, which would have multi- and intergenerational effects.

Although child care is the focus of this study, one should not disregard the importance and value of family economic stability and functioning. Ensuring that families are emotionally, socially, and economically stable would ensure that children are on track for school and life success. Although the authors sought to control the impact of various family and child demographics, that control may not completely mute the effects of familial factors, especially when the children in child care were likely to come from families in which mothers were employed and more educated. Understanding the mechanisms linking child care to later school and life outcomes are critical to ensure that children are supported and on track across the life course.

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Pediatrics 2020;146;
DOI: 10.1542/peds.2020-0483 originally published online June 11, 2020;

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