Grandparents a safe source of childcare

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For working parents, having grandparents as caregivers can cut the risk of childhood injury roughly in half, according to a new study by researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Compared to organized daycare or care by the mother or other relatives, having a grandmother watch a child was associated with a decreased risk of injury for the child. The study is among the first to examine the relationship between grandparents' care and childhood injury rates. The results are published in the November 2008 issue of *Pediatrics.*

In addition to source of caregiving, researchers examined the connections between family structure and the likelihood of injury. According to the researchers, the odds of injury were significantly greater among children whose parents never married compared with children whose mothers stayed married throughout the child's life. Similarly, odds of injury were greater for children living in homes in which the father did not co-reside. These associations were independent of family income.

"Recent growth in the number of grandparents providing childcare has some observers concerned they don't adhere to modern safety practices," said lead study author David Bishai, MD, PhD, MPH, a professor with the Bloomberg School's Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health. "To the contrary, this research tells us not only is there no evidence to support this assumption, but families that choose grandparents to care for their children experience fewer child injuries."

Bishai and colleagues analyzed data from the National Evaluation of the

Healthy Steps for Young Children Program, which includes information on over 5,500 newborns enrolled in 15 U.S. cities in 1996-97 with follow-up for 30-33 months. Data on child care arrangements reported by the mother were linked to claims reporting children's office visits, allowing researchers to identify medically attended injuries.

"As injuries are the number one cause of death for children in the United States, it's critical we continue to determine risk and protective factors," said study co-author Andrea C. Gielen, ScD, ScM, a co- author of the study and director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Additional studies of how households choose relatives to watch their children and the actual caregiving style of grandparents are warranted because the protective effect of grandparents may depend on choosing the right grandparent."

Source: Johns Hopkins University

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