

High-quality child care for low-income children: Long-term benefits

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More than 12 million U.S. children under age 6 attend child care or preschool programs. A new longitudinal study of low-income children has found that children in high-quality preschool settings had fewer behavior problems in middle childhood, and that such settings were particularly important for boys and African American children.

The study, carried out by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, Boston College, Universidad de Los Andes, Loyola University Chicago, and Northwestern University, appears in the September/October 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

"This study adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting the need for policy and programmatic efforts to increase low-income families' access to high-quality early care and education," according to Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, who led the study.

The researchers looked at about 350 children from low-income families in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio when they were preschoolers (ages 2 to 4) and again in middle childhood (ages 7 to 11). The children were part of the Three-City Study, a long-term study of the well-being of low-income children and families in the years following 1996 welfare reform. The authors note that the families in the study used [child care](#) normally available in their communities, including center-, Head Start, and home-based programs, rather than model or intervention programs.

Children who attended more responsive, stimulating, and well-structured settings during preschool had fewer externalizing [behavior problems](#) (such as being aggressive and breaking rules) in middle childhood, according to the study.

High-quality child care was particularly important for boys and African American children, the study found. These children seem to be especially responsive to the added supports of stimulating and responsive care outside the home.

"Beyond a few model early intervention programs and a handful of short-term longitudinal studies, our knowledge is limited concerning the implications of child care experiences for low-income children's later development," notes Votruba-Drzal. "This study strengthens our understanding of how the varying quality of child care experiences available to [children](#) in low-income families shapes children's development into middle childhood."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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