

New study examines link between child care subsidies and childhood obesity

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ASU's Chris Herbst, along with Erdal Tekin of Georgia State University, find that children receiving subsidized care have higher BMIs and are more likely to be overweight and obese than children who did not receive a subsidy. Photo by: stock.xchng photo

(Medical Xpress) -- A new study published in the *Journal of Urban Economics* by ASU's Chris Herbst, along with Erdal Tekin of Georgia State University, focuses on analyzing the impact of subsidized child care on disadvantaged children's weight outcomes.

The authors use the kindergarten cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, a nationally representative survey of kindergartners funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to assess whether [children](#)

receiving a government-provided subsidy in the year before kindergarten have rates of overweight and obesity at kindergarten entry that are different from comparable children who did not receive assistance.

Studying children of single (unmarried) mothers, Herbst and Tekin find that children receiving subsidized care have higher BMIs and are more likely to be overweight and obese than children who did not receive a subsidy. The authors' results imply that the odds of being overweight or obese are about 40 percent higher if a child receives a government-provided [child care](#) subsidy.

Herbst and Tekin examine childcare subsidies funded through the Child Care and Development Fund, a child care assistance program that was created in 1996 and is funded jointly by federal and state governments. This program is intended to provide low-skilled mothers with critical support to transition from welfare to work or to keep mothers off welfare in the first place. To be eligible for a subsidy, mothers must be employed, or in school or job training, and have an income below a certain threshold.

Herbst and Tekin speculate that the higher rates of [overweight and obesity](#) are driven by two factors: the program's employment mandate and the low-quality child care that the subsidy purchases. Given that disadvantaged [mothers](#) may feel the stress and time crunch associated with starting work, it is possible that some children consume less healthy meals and engage in fewer outdoor activities. In addition, the [subsidy](#) is not incredibly generous and may be used to purchase unregulated care, both of which raise concerns over the quality of care children are exposed to.

Provided by Arizona State University

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