

Study: Targeted funding can help address inequities in early child care programs

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The quality of early child care and education programs is influenced both by funding and by the characteristics of the communities in which the programs operate, new research from Oregon State University shows.

The findings indicate that law- and policy-makers may need to consider the demographics of communities when making funding decisions about early childhood programs, said Bridget Hatfield, an assistant professor in OSU's College of Public Health and Human Sciences.

That's especially important now because many states, including Oregon, are adopting or revising quality ratings systems that tie funding to program quality, Hatfield said.

Her findings were published recently in "*Early Childhood Research Quarterly*." Co-authors were Joanna K. Lower of Lower & Company, Deborah J. Cassidy of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Richard A. Faldowski of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hatfield received funding for the research from the Institute of Education Sciences at the University of Virginia.

Hatfield studied about 7,000 licensed early [child care](#) and education programs in North Carolina, which has one of the nation's oldest quality rating and improvement systems for early child care and [education programs](#). These systems are used by many states to determine how much government funding an early child care and education program

receives.

Oregon and many other states are in the midst of implementing a quality rating system.

Hatfield found that children from low-income communities have less access to high-quality early child care and preschool, even though they are likely to gain more benefits from it.

"There are a lot of barriers to high-quality education in disadvantaged communities," she said. "Hiring teachers with bachelor's degrees, providing appropriate school supplies and play equipment – you need money to do all those things."

Her research also showed that additional government funding can provide a significant boost to the quality of programs in disadvantaged communities. Those programs make bigger quality improvements when they receive extra funding than programs that are in more affluent communities, Hatfield found.

"Just because a program is in a disadvantaged community doesn't mean it can't attain high quality," she said. "The extra money helps the programs in [disadvantaged communities](#) close the gap."

Hatfield studied family child care homes, where child care is provided in a private home, as well as child care centers and preschool programs, including federal programs such as Head Start.

The research shows that quality of child care can vary based on [funding](#), but other factors also affect program quality, Hatfield said.

For example, in other research projects, she is studying the interactions between teachers and children in the classroom. That kind of research

will help child care program leaders determine how best to spend money they receive to improve their programs.

"If we give people more money, what's the best way to spend it?" she said. "Do we buy more puzzles for the children or train the teachers to better use the puzzles they have?"

More information: media.eurekalert.org/multimedia/pub/media/73320.jpeg

Provided by Oregon State University

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