

Daycare choice has lasting effects for African American kids

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A longitudinal study led by a University of Pittsburgh psychologist reveals that children from low-income families placed in high-quality preschool programs have fewer behavioral problems in middle childhood, and that such settings were especially important for boys and Black children. The study, conducted by researchers at Pitt, Boston College, Universidad de los Andes, Loyola University Chicago, and Northwestern University, has been published in the September/October 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,” said Pitt assistant professor of psychology Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, who led the study.

The researchers looked at approximately 350 children from low-income families in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio when they were preschoolers, ages two to four, and again when they reached middle childhood, ages seven to 11. The youngsters were part of the Three-City Study, a long-term look at the well-being of low-income families following welfare reform in 1996. The children in the study used the childcare options available in their communities.

An examination of the data revealed that children who attended more responsive, stimulating, and well-structured settings during preschool had fewer behavioral problems—such as aggression and rule breaking—in middle childhood.

High-quality care was particularly important for boys and Black children, the study found. Children in those groups seemed to be especially responsive to stimulating and responsive care outside the home. Votruba-Drzal says the study strengthens the researchers’ understanding of how child development in low-income families is shaped by childcare experiences.

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