

New Evidence on the Impacts of Access to and Attending Universal Childcare in Canada

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Abstract

In Canada, advocates of universal child care often point to policies implemented in Quebec as providing a model for early education and care policies in other provinces. While these policies have proven to be incredibly popular among citizens, initial evaluations of access to these programs indicated they led to a multitude of undesirable child developmental, health and family outcomes. These research findings ignited substantial controversy and criticism. In this study, we show the robustness of the initial analyses to i) concerns over whether negative outcomes would vanish over time as suppliers gained experience providing child care, ii) concerns regarding multiple testing, and iii) concerns that the original test measured the causal impact of childcare availability and not child care attendance. A notable exception is that despite policy effect estimates indicating declines in motor-social development scores in Quebec relative to the rest of Canada, our results imply that attending childcare led to a significant increase in this test score. Our analysis reveals substantial heterogeneity in program impacts and indicates that some of the negative impacts reported in earlier research are driven by children from families who only attended childcare in response to the implementation of the policy.

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