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Quality daycare pays off, study says

Benefits extend into adulthood

NYT and AP, Raleigh, N.C.

High-quality daycare has a dramatic impact that lasts through young adulthood, affecting everything from reading and math skills to the timing of child-bearing, researchers announced yesterday in the first study that tracked participants from infancy to age 21.

The U.S. researchers believe their results are the first to definitively link high-quality child care, beginning as early as six weeks of age, with a better adult life. Beginning in 1972, the study tracked 111 children from infancy through age 21.

"We view these results as grounds for optimism that high-quality, early-childhood education can be an important ingredient in supporting young families," said Craig Ramey, a professor of psychology, pediatrics and neurobiology at the University of Alabama.

"We're talking about changing the course of children's lives in the most fundamental way possible," said Frances Campbell, one

of the investigators.

The children were divided into two groups: 54 who had an array of child-care arrangements, and 57 who received high-quality care at a daycare centre, starting when they were between six weeks and four months of age.

Of the 111 original participants, 104 were evaluated last spring.

Among the findings:

- The high-quality daycare children had higher cognitive test scores than the control group from toddler years to age 21.
- Their academic achievement in both reading and math was higher from the primary grades through young adulthood.
- They completed more years of education and were more likely to attend a four-year college.
- They were, on average, two years older (19 years) when their first child was born, compared with those in the control group

(17 years), though the youngest parents in both groups were comparable in age when the first child was born.

Benefits extended beyond the children: their mothers achieved higher educational and employment status than mothers of control-group children, the study found.

The children who attended the daycare centre attended all day, five days a week. The child-teacher ratio was low, gradually increasing to 7-1 from 3-1. Teacher turnover was low because the pay was high.

The research project still needs a cost-benefit analysis, said Edward Zigler, a psychology professor at Yale University who helped plan government-run child-care programs for low-income people.

"That's what really turns decision-makers on," Prof. Zigler said.

Research was conducted at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The article EM9903 reprinted above is used in Figure 11.8d of the STAT 221 Course Materials.