

Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development 1998-2010: Overview of Knowledge on Daycare Services for Preschool and Elementary School-Aged Children

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Objective: The main objective was to present an overview of current knowledge on daycare services using the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD).

Context: The current daycare situation arises directly from new family policy provisions implemented in 1997, which made low-cost daycare services available for preschool and elementary school-aged children. The QLSCD began in 1998, targeting children born of mothers who were Quebec residents in 1997-1998. Those children were followed yearly from 5 months to 8 years old, and every two years until they reached 12. The study collected information on each child's environment and development.

Summary (preschool, 0-5 years old): The presenters showed that for that age group, there was a significant increase in daycare use based on age, as well as an increase in use of early childhood centers (CPE) compared to other types of daycare. They then showed the impact of daycare on childhood development. Physically, they found an increase in respiratory infections and antibiotics consumption and a decrease in dental cavities. Cognitively, there is a positive link between a history of daycare between 5 months and 5 years old and math skills in kindergarten. On a socio-affective level, the presenters found no link between a history of daycare and physical aggressiveness in kindergarten. Finally, they explained that conclusions must be carefully qualified because children at risk are less likely to attend daycare, and when they do it is likely to be with lesser quality services.

Summary (elementary school, 6-8 years old): In this age group, daycare attendance doubled between 1996-1997 and 2007-2008. 88% of children attended school daycare services (SDCS) between kindergarten and grade four. However, the proportion of children attending SDCS decreases based on the children's age. This is corroborated by data gathered by the Ministère de l'Éducation, des Loisirs et des Sports. SDCS attendance is also negatively correlated with the existence of a big brother or sister. The authors observed that the higher the mother's level of education or income, the greater the likelihood of daycare use. They also noted a few interesting research topics to explore in relation to SDCS.

Conclusion: The presenters concluded with a number of factors that must be considered in analyzing daycare, and noted the consensus in the scientific community on the importance of quality daycare services for preschool and elementary school-aged children.