Childcare

A summary of the scientific literature on childcare.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Birth to age 3 is a crucial and dynamic period of growth for children. Over the past fifty years, there has been a dramatic expansion of large programs and ambitious policies aimed at enhancing the daily environments

of infants and toddlers in the United States. The increased use of clinical trials has significantly improved researchers' ability to make and advance causal claims about the overall effects of different policies and programs.

READ THE BRIEF: What Policies Advance Infants and Toddlers? Evidence to Inform State and Federal Options, 2020

Talking Points from the SRCD Brief

- Empirical findings identify paid leave for parents after a newborn arrives, regular pediatric assessments including home visiting, and having quality caregivers in homes/centers as three policy models that benefit infants and toddlers.
- The field of infant-toddler care is situated within a public and private network of health-care providers, home, and child-care settings — often hosted in privately run settings, while variably regulated by public authorities.
- Most federal support of infants and toddlers, regardless of family income, comes through tax or health-care benefits.
    - Programs include the Supplemental Food and Nutrition Program (SNAP, Food Stamps), the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program, Head Start, and the Child Care and Developmental Fund (CCDF).
- State governments and public programs spend more than twice as much on school-aged children as they do on infants and toddlers.
- Inventive state policies mainly help in building up organizational capacity, including infant-toddler programs in schools and community-based organizations.

Policy Considerations in the Brief

- It is important that policy makers and scholars recognize how the United States patchwork of collective efforts to care for infants and toddlers, unfolds inside social organizations rooted in public and private sectors.
- Hyper-specialization distracts us from asking basic questions that inform results to enrich our understanding of the wider civic conversation around how programs interact with one another locally, and how parents weigh the more desirable, affordable, and most trustworthy option.

- Consider what policy levers might best enrich the positive features of social interplay between infant-toddler, parent, and childcare or health provider.
- Bring developmental science to a level at which it can inform policy tools at in local setting, which may yield stronger benefits.

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