After-School Care: Child Outcomes and Recommendations for Research and Policy

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ABSTRACT: With increases in family employment rates, there is growing interest in how children spend their time after school. This paper reviews the current research literature on relative care, non-relative care, after-school programs, and self-care for school age children with special attention paid to child outcomes from participation in various after school care arrangements. Research shows mixed findings regarding relations between type of after-school care and child outcome. The use of self-care is not associated with negative child outcomes for predominantly Caucasian children within rural and suburban populations. Different outcomes for self-care are found, however, within urban and minority communities. For low-income families, positive effects from participation in formal after-school programs are found. Major policy recommendations are: (1) to increase federal funding available for after-school programs; (2) to set standards for programs; (3) to involve the community in administering after-school programs, and (4) to make more information regarding after-school care options available to parents.

KEY WORDS: after-school policy; school-age children; child care.

In the last several decades, family employment rates and family structure have changed considerably. Compared to the 1950s, the number of women participating in the labor force has increased by about 250% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). The percentage of women participating in the labor force will continue to increase by 330% by the year 2025 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). The percentage of children six years and younger with both parents in the labor force has increased from 51 to 62% between 1985 and 1998. For children between the ages of 6 and 17, this percentage has increased from 63% in 1985 to 71% in 1998 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Today, there are more than 28 million

school-age children with both (or all) parents in the labor force (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Furthermore, the percentage of children who live in single-parent families has more than doubled since 1970 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These changes in the family have contributed to an increasing demand for after-school care for children of all ages (Brimhall, Reaney, & West, 1999). For many parents, there is increased concern about how children should spend their time after school and what the consequences for children are of various types of care.

In general, after-school care can be categorized into four types: (1) relative care, (2) non-relative care, (3) after-school programs, and (4) self-care (Brimhall et al., 1999). Relative care consists of children being supervised by an extended family member (e.g., grandparent, aunt, etc.) after or before school. In non-relative care, supervision is given by someone outside of the family, often by a hired sitter. After-school programs, sometimes referred to as "extended-day" programs, are typically operated in school buildings or local community centers (Schwendiman & Fager, 1999). Finally, children who spend after-school time without any adult supervision are referred to as self-care children.

According to the 1995 National Household Education Survey (NHES: 95) conducted by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 39% of children between kindergarten and third grade receive some form of non-parental care before and/or after school on a weekly basis (Brimhall et al., 1999). On average, those children spend about 14 h per week in non-parental care before- and/ or after school. Among those 39%, approximately 44% of children participate in relative care, 36% are in center-based programs, and about one fourth are in non-relative care. Approximately 5% of children are in self-care without any adult supervision. The number of children without any adult supervision during the after-school time rises markedly as children age.

NHES: 95 (Brimhall et al., 1999) shows that there are differences in after-school care needs across ethnic groups. Among African-American children, 45% are in after-school care, whereas this figure is at 34% for Caucasians, 31% for Hispanic, and 34% for children classified as "other." Thus, African-American children are more likely to receive after-school care than any other ethnic group. Demographic differences in before and/or after school care arrangements are also found. African-American (24%) and Hispanic (19%) children are more likely than Caucasian children (13%) to be in relative care, whereas Caucasian children (10%) are more likely to be in non-relative care than African-American (5%) and Hispanic (7%) children. 19% of African-American children are enrolled in a center-based program after school.

This enrollment rate is greater than that for Caucasian (12%) and Hispanic (7%) children. Furthermore, the higher the education of the mother, the more likely it is that the child is in center-based or non-relative after-school care as opposed to other types (Brimhall et al., 1999).

Although the percentages of children who spend time in before or after school care during the week are similar across income levels, low-income families use more relative care and less non-relative and center-based programs than other families (Brimhall et al., 1999). The National Child Care Survey (NCCS: 1990) (cited in Miller, 1995) concurs. According to the NCCS, 15% of children in families above the poverty level compared to 8% below the poverty level attend center or school-based programs. The National Study of Before- and After-School Programs (Seppanen et al., 1993) reported that little financial support is available for low-income families with school-age children.

A survey conducted by the School-Age Day Care Task Force in 1972 (cited in Seligson, 2001) illustrated that after-school programs encounter many financial and facilities problems. When funds are available for these programs, they are often only enough to cover start-up costs (Seligson, 2001). In 1991, on average, 83% of such program's income came from fees paid by parents, with only 10% provided through government support (Seppanen et al., 1993). An estimated 86% of parents whose children are in after-school programs, pay the full fee.

Because parent fees are the main source of funding for school-age care, before- and after-school care programs are very expensive for families. As a result, many parents cannot afford to enroll their children in these programs. Although fees for child care for school-age children vary, the national average cost is $286 per month (Urban Institute, 2000). This average cost includes families using child care 50 h per week and those using child care 10 h per week. According to the Urban Institute, nearly half of all working families with a child under the age of 13 spend about 9% of their monthly earnings on child-care expenses. For families whose incomes are below the federal poverty level, however, child-care costs typically comprise up to 23% of monthly earnings.

Center-based programs can thus be an expensive choice for parents. Tirozzi, the former Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, reported in a 1998 hearing of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources that 90% of both elementary and middle school parents want after-school programs (Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1998). If, in fact, after-school programs are the best choice for children, and parents indeed desire these types of programs, new ideas for funding such programs need to be presented.

There is a growing awareness among the public about the problem of after-school care (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2001). According to a survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance (2000), more than one-third of voters believe that the biggest problem facing children today is that they are alone and unsupervised. Furthermore, the percentage of voters who show this concern has grown in recent years, from 26% in 1998 to 38% in 1999.

With increased concern about school-age child care, researchers, the public, and politicians have begun to show an interest in the relations between various after school care arrangements and child outcomes. This paper presents an overview of the current state of after-school care. Section "Historical Overview of After-School Programs" provides a brief historical overview of after-school programs. Section "Making the After-School Care Devision" reviews the literature on after-school care and child outcomes. In the Section "Self-Care," directions for future research are suggested and a description of two programs already in place is given. Finally, policy recommendations are discussed.

Historical Overview of After-School Programs

Early examples of after-school programs are found in settlement houses of the 1890s (Vandell & Su, 1999). During that time, care for school-age children was provided by charities and day nurseries (Seligson, Genser, Gannett, & Gray, 1983). During World War II, public schools were widely involved in after-school programs and other forms of child care (Seligson, 2001). Three decades later, however, the number of schools that provide after-school programs has decreased.

In the late 1970s, some states began to recognize the need for school-age child care. In Indiana, for example, a cigarette tax was passed for after-school care and other educational purposes in 1987. A more recent example is California's "After-School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program." This program was enacted in 1998 to encourage school and community partnerships to promote academic and literacy development, and to provide safe and constructive after-school options for school age children.

In 1991, there were about 49,500 before- and after-school programs operating in the U.S. (Seppanen et al., 1993). Among these programs, 13,500 (23%) were based in the public schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) reported that, in 1993, nearly 30% of public schools and 50% of private schools provided before- and after-school care. This is a significant increase over the 15 and 33% of 1988.

Making the After-School Care Decision

It is important to understand what motivates the decisions that parents make regarding how their children spend their time after-school. The major factors that parents consider when making this decision are characteristics of their children, child preferences, and the convenience and economics of the arrangement (Powell & Widdows, 1987). Children's satisfaction with after-school arrangements is very important to parents. They will even choose self-care at their children's request despite their own dissatisfaction with this choice. Children are usually more satisfied with the freedom that self-care provides than with the stigma of attending day-care center programs. In the Powell and Widdows study, the children who were placed in self-care because of their preference were usually from two-parent families with greater availability for support. Many single parents in this study did not use self-care for their children because the children would not be able to reach them by phone. Another factor in parents' decisions about after-school care is their values regarding the type of structure and experiences children need during time after school. Parents whose children were in after-school programs rated program characteristics as more important than parents whose children were in self-care. While parents in this study did not rate finances as a deciding factor in after-school care decisions, the authors suggest that costs of programs may have affected what choices parents felt were available to them.

Cain and Hofferth (1989) propose a model for parents' decision-making processes in this area. In their theory, parents must first decide whether their children will have parental or non-parental care upon returning home from school. Factors that weigh in on this decision are the parents' employment, the cost of alternatives to parental care, family income level, availability of relative care, and personal preferences for type of care.

When the parents have reached the decision of nonparental care, then they must decide on the use of self-care or other care arrangements (Cain & Hofferth, 1989). When making this decision, Cain and Hofferth state that parents will consider three factors; the quality of care, the cost of care, and the preference of care. Child characteristics, such as independence, and responsibility, along with the safety of the neighborhood will be factors that help to determine the quality of the self-care experience. While self-care has no monetary costs, parents have to consider indirect costs of allowing their children to stay home alone. These indirect costs can be worry for their children, or time costs from phone conversations with the child, or unexpected trips

home. Parent and child characteristics will also determine care preferences.

When testing their model, Cain and Hofferth (1989) found that family financial needs were a large factor in determining the use of non-parental care. They also found that in choosing type of non-parental care, higher income families living in the suburbs were more likely to use self-care than families of lower income living in central city areas. When other options were available, however, such as relative or family member care, self-care was not typically chosen. When parents are making the choice about which type of non-parental care to use, they should be aware of the child outcomes associated with each type of care. This information, such as that which follows in the Section "Self-Care," should be made available to parents through schools, doctor's offices, community centers, and government agencies.

Self-Care

Self-care offers the least amount of adult supervision for the child of all the various types of after-school care. It is a widespread belief that there are negative consequences of leaving a child without the immediate supervision of an adult (Cain & Hofferth, 1989). Such children were previously called "latchkey children" because they often wore keys to their houses around their necks (Diamond, Kataria, & Messer, 1989). In contrast to widespread belief, early research often indicated no difference between children left in self-care and children left in other arrangements where an adult was physically present (Diamond et al., 1989; Galambos & Garbarino, 1985; Messer, Wuensch, & Diamond, 1989; Rodman, Pratto, & Nelson, 1985; Steinberg, 1986; Vandell & Corasaniti, 1988). This early research, while offering a good start to the examination of the effects of self-care, has many limitations, however.

In their study of children in a rural setting, Galambos and Garbarino (1985) found no differences in teacher-reported behaviors of latchkey and non-latchkey fifth- and seventh-graders. The sample of this study was predominantly white and participants lived in a stable community (families rarely moved) and in single-family homes. These results, thus, could not be generalized to suburban or urban populations where there is typically greater cultural diversity, a variety of different housing structures, and different crime rates. Diamond et al. (1989), who also found no differences between latchkey children and non-latchkey children in their rural sample,

recommend that further research explore the effects of community differences.

Messer et al. (1989) compared the personality characteristics and academic achievement of college students who reported self-care when they were children and college students who reported having adult supervision after school. No differences in adjustment in these two groups of college students were found. Again however, the sample of this study was quite homogeneous. As college attendance can be viewed as an indicator of good academic achievement and behavioral functioning, one would hardly expect large differences on these variables with such a sample.

Rodman et al. (1985) were limited by their data collection method as well as their rural sample. These authors compared the self-esteem and social adjustment of children in self-care and children in maternal care and found no differences. When collecting information from their participants, however, they only asked for current after-school arrangements. They did not find out how long the children were in this arrangement. Length of time in various current or previous arrangements may have affected the child's functioning as measured in this study.

In their suburban sample of third-graders, Vandell and Corasaniti (1988) found that children who returned home to an empty house the majority of the school week had commensurate academic achievement and performance with children whose mothers were home when they returned from school. In addition, these children also received similar parent and teacher ratings of emotional well-being, interpersonal interactions, and study skills. The authors of this study also caution against the generalization of these findings to other populations. Thus, while the research cited so far may indicate that, among white rural and suburban populations the use of self-care after school appears to be associated with no ill effects, these results cannot speak to other urban and culturally diverse populations.

Steinberg (1986) indicated varied effects of self-care depending on how the adolescents in their study spent their unsupervised time. Steinberg created groups based on different types of self-care: unsupervised at home, unsupervised at a friend's home, and unsupervised "hanging out." When comparing children who went home directly after-school to children who were in maternal care, Steinberg found no differences in the adolescents' susceptibility to negative peer pressure. Children who were not required to go straight home and spent time "hanging out" at local shopping malls were more vulnerable to the negative influences of peers. This study introduces the importance of

considering different types of self-care when determining the developmental effects of its use.

Other studies, some more recent, provide evidence that self-care has different effects depending on demographic variables such as socioeconomic status or community characteristics (Lovko & Ullman, 1989; Marshall et al., 1997; Pettit, Laird, Bates, & Dodge, 1997; Shulman, Kedem, Kaplan, Sever, & Braja, 1998). Lovko and Ullman found that part of latchkey children's variance in anxiety level, self-perceived social ability, and behavior problems could be predicted by demographic variables and latchkey situation variables. They found that sex, income, and presence of or interaction with other children significantly predicted child outcomes on the above three variables. Girls in self-care had higher anxiety levels than boys. When sex was controlled for, there were no differences in anxiety levels between children in self-care and children in other types of care. Self-care children of lower income families had more adjustment problems than self-care children of higher income families. Self-care children who were allowed more peer interaction had increased behavior problems. These preliminary findings provide evidence that other demographic variables should be examined as to their contribution to child outcomes.

Pettit et al. (1997) indicate that there are links between self-care during the hours after school and later behavioral and academic adjustment. These links were found to be independent of the child's prior adjustment. Children who spent more than four hours in self-care per week were found to be at risk for later academic adjustment. These children were more at risk when they were from homes of a lower socioeconomic status, when they already exhibited behavior difficulties before they were placed in self-care, and when they did not participate in extra-curricular activities. These results are consistent with those of Marshall et al. (1997). This study examined the effects of different types of after-school care on the behavioral adjustment of children from an urban population. The findings of this study indicate that children of a lower socioeconomic status whose parents chose unsupervised self-care demonstrated more externalizing problems than similar children who were in after-school programs. This association was not present in self-care children of a higher socioeconomic status. Posner and Vandell (1994) also noted positive associations between self-care and antisocial behavior.

In addition to the assessment of the risks of self-care, there is also some speculation regarding possible benefits of self-care for some children (Belle, 1997). Some children may benefit from the freedom and the valued responsibilities incurred from self-care. Belle suggests it is important to assess the child's perceptions of being left at home

alone. While there are potential benefits, children could also have negative perceptions due to loneliness or overwhelming responsibilities of caring for younger siblings and housework.

When deciding to use self-care, parents need to be educated about appropriate times and ages to leave their children unsupervised. An internet resource for parents recommends that children younger than 12 not be left at home alone (Telephone Counseling and Referral Service, 2001). They suggest a checklist of questions that parents can use to determine if their child is ready to be left in self-care. Examples of factors to be considered are the age of the child, the child's level of comfort with being left alone, and neighborhood safety.

Relative Care

When parents choose not to leave their children in self-care during the hours before- and after- school, they consider other alternatives that provide more supervision. One option that parents choose is family or relative care. Hunts and Avery (1998) indicate that the majority of families will choose a relative as a caregiver at some point during the week. Family care can be beneficial because it is more cost-effective than day care settings. Hunts and Avery found that only a very small number of families compensated relatives for this care. Parents may also feel better about relative care because they have greater familiarity with the caregiver. This type of care is common and increases in frequency of use throughout the elementary school years (Pettit et al., 1997).

Cultural and religious differences exist in the use of relative care (Hunts & Avery, 1998). African-American and Hispanic families show a strong preference for this type of care for their children. Hunts and Avery also found that Christian families were more likely to choose relative care than families who indicated their religion as "other." Relative care was also more prevalent in the northeast U. S. than the south and in families with non-traditional work hours and shift work.

In general, there appear to be no risks associated with relative care. Among children of a higher SES, Pettit et al. (1997) found no significant differences in academic performance when comparing children in this type of care with children in day-care or sitter-care. For children of lower SES, however, family (or sitter) care appeared to be a protective factor. Children of lower SES in family (or sitter) care had better academic achievement and performance than children who had no adult supervision at all. Children of lower SES appear to benefit from this type of informal supervision. Pettit et al. also indicate that the amount of informal out-of-home care with a neighbor has a curvilinear

relation with the child's outcome. A small amount of this type of care was associated with increased academic and behavioral competence, especially for girls. A large amount of informal neighbor care, however, was linked to diminished competence in these areas for boys and girls.

Hunts and Avery (1998) suggest that policy makers seek ways to provide direct funding to families to support the use of relative care for their children. This is a way to ensure that children have reliable supervision after school and to encourage parents' participation in the work force, therefore ensuring economic stability for families. Another, more efficient, use of federal funds may be to provide financial support to public after-school programs that would service more children than direct funding for relative care.

Day Care and After-School Programs

Day care centers also offer after-school care supervision for children whose parents choose non-parental care. A benefit of these centers is that they sometimes provide transportation from the school to the center. Vandell and Corasaniti (1988), however, discovered that third-graders who attended day-care centers after school experienced difficulty. These children were less liked by their peers and had lower grades and standardized test scores than children who did not attend these day-care centers. The authors suggest that it is possible that the day-care centers of their sample were of questionable quality, which factored into the negative outcomes. Another suggestion they offer is that there may be a stigma related to day-care attendance as children get older. As some are picked up from school by day-care vans, they are easily identified as children who attend day-care. Children who went home to a babysitter or a relative do not have the same visibility to their peers and teachers.

Lastly, after-school programs are another option parents have for after-school care. This type of care usually provides the most structure for children. Just like the other types of care, however, there is much variation in the types of after-school programs that are offered to children. A variety of programs are offered through local community centers and public schools and can include extra curriculum instruction, homework help, play time, or sports and music activities (Pettit et al., 1997).

Studies of the effects of after-school programs offer different findings depending on the population and the type of program activity. Pettit et al. (1997) investigated after-school care that they referred to as

"activity-oriented." This type of care was centered on an activity such as a sports or music. They found a curvilinear relationship between the amount of time children spent in this type of care and adjustment. While reasonable amounts (between 1 and 4 h per week) of activity-oriented care were found to be beneficial for children's adjustment, larger amounts were associated with poorer adjustment. Pettit et al. suggest that "the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities diminish as these activities begin to occupy larger portions of out-of-school life" (p. 535).

Posner and Vandell (1994) found that children from a lower SES experienced strong positive effects from participating in formal after-school programs. Their participation in these programs was associated with better behavior in school, better grades, better emotional adjustment, and better peer relations than children in other types of after-school care. These findings are in contrast to negative associations with formal after-school program attendance of children from a middle-class family (Vandell & Corasaniti, 1988). Posner and Vandell suggest that participation in these formal and structured programs did not allow these children to participate in other enriching activities like sports or music lessons. It is likely that children of low-income, urban families who do not attend after-school programs do not have access to these other activities. Another explanation for the striking benefits of after-school programs for low-income, urban children is that the programs expose them to more learning opportunities than they would have in other types of after-school care. If they were not in these programs, they would most likely spend their time participating in unstructured activities in their neighborhoods such as hanging out or spend this time watching television. In this study, children in after-school programs spent more time on academic activities than children in other types of care.

Marshall et al. (1997) also report that children not in after-school programs spend more time watching television and playing video games. Children in after-school programs also had less internalizing problems, which the authors explain is a function of the added time they spend interacting with their peers at these programs. The authors also suggest that another benefit to after-school programs is that they provide play time with peers that is less structured than the school atmosphere but that still has the supervision of adults. Morrison, Storino, Robertson, Weissglass, and Dondero (2000) also found that participation in after-school care was a protective factor for fifth- and sixth-graders who were at-risk for substance abuse.

In their investigation of the effects of after-school programs, Pierce, Hamm, and Vandell (1999) felt it was important to address the effects of

specific characteristics of the programs. They looked at the emotional climate of the programs, the quality of the children's interactions with peers, and program curriculum. They found that programs that had warmer and more positive climates were associated with less internalizing and externalizing problems for boys. Programs that were less positive did not have these same effects. In addition, when participating in programs that allowed for more individual choice and autonomous decision making on the part of the children, boys demonstrated better social competence then when in less flexible programs.

The After-School Care Dilemma

The above illustrates the different options and outcomes that parents consider in making their choice for after school care. Unfortunately, parents do not always have the luxury of choosing after-school care based solely on the enriching opportunities the program can offer their children or personal or child preferences. Miller, O'Connor, and Sirignano (1995) discuss the factors that are involved in parents' decisions about after-school care. Three large factors that influence parents' decisions are income, geographical area, and transportation from school to the program they choose. Families with lower incomes must choose the most economic route for care. This, as described above, often includes self-care or relative care. Child-care centers with structured programs can be too expensive for families with minimal income. The family's geographical area also affects what choices are available to the parents. Rural and low-income urban areas do not have the same variety of organized activities from which to choose. Fewer opportunities for enrichment are available, and parents of low-income also have difficulty paying for the opportunities that do exist (Miller et al., 1995).

Families and parents are not the only people to benefit from after-school care. The community benefits from after-school care, as well. The hours between two o'clock and eight o'clock constitute the time-period when most juvenile crime and violence occurs (Fight Crime/ Invest in Kids, 1997). As a result, people of the general community should be interested and involved in the type of programs that are offered to families for after-school care and supervision.

Another difficulty presented to parents in making after-school care arrangements is transportation. Parents who work are often not available to drive their children from school to the place of after-school care, and they must pay in order to have their children transported through means offered by a daycare center. This dilemma reduces the

number of options the parents have in providing preferred types of after-school care for their children. Some may even argue that this limits the ability of parents to provide adequate or even appropriate after-school supervision for their children.

Directions for Future Research

Despite the research described above, there is still much to be learned about after-school care. First, more information needs to be gathered about children in self-care. In determining the benefits or drawbacks of this type of care, it is important to know in what specific ways children spend their time alone. Children have many options for how to spend this time, such as watching television, playing video games, surfing the internet, talking on the phone, or hanging out in malls or at friends' houses. With the increasing presence of computers in the household, children's increased access to the internet may affect how beneficial or detrimental this unsupervised time can be. In addition, the responsibilities of chores or caring for a sibling may also affect how this time is spent and how self-care affects the child's overall development. These issues need further investigation.

In addition, researchers should investigate what types of rules parents establish for their children who are placed in self-care. Parents may have rules about the completion of homework during this time or safety rules such as how to answer the phone or the door, or not leaving the house or using the stove. Future research should also look at how much children adhere to these rules that parents set for them. Belle (1997) suggests future research examine the geographical reach of children during after-school time. She indicates that it is important to know what types of activities and places children can access during this time alone. This availability depends on the child's surrounding community. For example, depending on where they live, rural vs. urban settings, children may or may not have access to public transportation, friends' houses, parks, or shopping malls. Depending on the availability of these types of activities, lack of supervision could have either positive or negative effects on children's development. Knowing where children go during this time and with whom can affect how parents make these decisions about after-school care.

Another topic for future research is how the availability of cell phones and pagers has possibly affected parents' decision-making process. Parents may be more inclined to place their children in self-care, or they may feel more comfortable with their decision to place their child in self-care because they are more accessible to their

children through the use of these items. These items are becoming increasingly accessible to parents and children through lower rates and family calling plans. Access to these may increase communication between parents and children during the after-school time and provide more parental supervision during this time.

In addition to research on self-care, future research should also consider the differential effects of after-school programs. While these programs appear to have positive effects for children of low-income families, it is clear that the quality of the programs makes a difference. Future research should seek to learn more about what factors determine the quality of after-school care and how these factors may differ depending on the population the program serves. Powell and Widdows (1987) also suggest that future researchers give attention to children's perceptions of after-school care arrangements. Their perceptions may affect how receptive they are to certain arrangements and their attitudes and behavior while in these arrangements. Researchers may also wish to consider parenting beliefs and how they affect parents' decisions regarding after-school care, for better or for worse.

Lastly, Laird, Pettit, Dodge, and Bates (1998) encourage further understanding of the developmental appropriateness of different types of school-age child-care as children get older. Understanding these changes can help in knowing how different types of care at certain points in development can be appropriate or inappropriate choices and designing age-appropriate programs. Coleman, Rowland, and Robinson (1989) state that simply adding a school-age child care room to a preschool center would be ineffective and inappropriate for children in later childhood. Activities and facilities need to accommodate the schedules, interests, and abilities of older children. Understanding developmental changes can also help parents in making after-school care decisions if they were to know which type of care is appropriate at different ages. In all cases, parents want to choose care that is appropriate for their children's social, cognitive, and physical ability. Younger children will need care that is more structured; they will benefit from planned and structured activities. As they grow older and more independent, they will likely require more autonomy and individual choice in their after school activities.

Current Large Scale After-School Programs

The Department of Education provides funds directly to school districts to establish extended-learning programs after school, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (Seligson,

2001). This program is "a school-based/school-linked family support program designed to promote children's optimal development by providing high-quality child day-care and support services to children from birth through age 12" (Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Marsland, 1995, p. 1303). This program provides a variety of services to families and children. The component of this program that is relevant to this discussion is the School-Based Before- and After-School Care program that they provide for children between the ages of 5 and 12. This program has been implemented in over 300 schools to address the problems of availability and accessibility of high-quality after-school care to families who need it.

The 21st Century model for after-school care calls for care to take place within the existing school system (Zigler et al., 1995). The program is not seen as separate from the school and is run by school personnel. This is in contrast to other after-school programs that are run by companies contracted by school systems. This program follows several guiding principles to ensure high-quality care for all children who need it. These principles include access to high-quality care for all children, care that addresses all aspects of development (social, cognitive, physical, and emotional), professional development for the care providers, parental participation, voluntary participation of the families, and integration and involvement with the community. The program provides continuous care for children year-round staffed by fully trained professionals. Activities in before- and after-school care are to be different from the academic day, providing physical activities, organized recreation, or quiet, relaxing time.

Preliminary findings of evaluations of this program suggest several benefits to children and their parents (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999). Parents reported spending less money on child-care and missing less time at work. Parents whose children were involved in this program also reported having more positive perceptions of their children's schools. Lower levels of parental stress were also related to participation in this program. The children in this program benefited from spending less time unsupervised and more time in high-quality consistent care. They also had higher academic achievement in math and reading than matched controls who did not participate in this program. Other general child benefits of this program are reduced absenteeism, reductions in behavioral problems, and less need for special services (Zigler et al., 1995). These benefits may also result in positive consequences for society in general, such as less money spent on later interventions, lower after-school crime rates, or better preparation for life after the school years. Continued evaluation of these

programs needs to be conducted in order to provide more evidence for the primary and secondary benefits of these programs.

Another effective after-school care program is the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). This program focuses on providing youth development opportunities to low-income children and adolescents (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001). In serving this specific population, BGCA offers activities that promote growth using caring, stable adults. This type of program provides a safe environment where children can learn academic skills and participate in and enjoy recreational activities while developing positive bonds with their peers and staff.

Staff members serve as role models and provide support for boys in BGCA (Roffman et al., 2001). Relationships with the staff members contributed to higher self-esteem and reduced behavior problems in young boys. As a result of these positive relationships, staff members also play an important role in getting children to choose the positive and safe after-school environment of BGCA. In addition, the activities available at the clubs have been associated with higher self-esteem and fewer behavior problems among boys. Children involved with BGCA also reported that they get a general feeling of well-being from their treatment at the clubs and from the atmosphere of the clubs (Roffman et al., 2001).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Research indicates that lower-income children placed in self-care are at risk for later developmental difficulties. These children often experience later behavioral and academic difficulties. While such children are shown to do better in adult-supervised environments, access to after-school programs is usually limited for these children because of the high cost of these programs or the availability of programs.

It is clear that low-income parents long to have greater access to more formal child care arrangements within their communities (Miller et al., 1995). These mothers express that they are more willing to gain employment when they are assured of the quality of care available for their children. Miller et al. have shown that, in low-income urban communities, quality care is not as accessible as in other environments. This is problematic when combined with the evidence that children in these environments experience negative effects of being placed in self-care. In order to address this problem, more after-school care alternatives to self-care need to be offered to children in these

settings. These alternatives could be in the form of relative care or high-quality after-school programs. This introduces the additional problem of accessibility and funding for these options.

The largest difficulty in implementing after-school care programs is funding (Zigler et al., 1995). Start-up costs include renovation of spaces, appropriation of materials, and additional funds for low-income families. In addition to these costs are the operational costs, which include staff salaries, professional development and training of staff, supplies, and utilities. Initially, funds for the 21st Century Program were obtained through community and district resources. Now, this program is also funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Federal funds should continue to go toward after-school care programs similar to the 21st Century Program and the BGCA. These types of programs offer accessible solutions to the problem of unsupervised self-care for children from lower-income environments.

The quality of after-school care programs is another important consideration. After-school care programs should meet federally mandated standards. These standards should consider the age and developmental stages of children to ensure that these programs provide appropriate care. For example, programs for younger children would involve more structure while programs for older children would offer more variety and individual choice in activities. There should also be standards for appropriate ratios between children and staff. Program staff should consist of adults who are specifically trained in the supervision and mentoring of children. This training should also be ongoing to provide staff with up-to-date information taken from current research in child development.

All people should be interested and involved in making decisions about what after-school care programs are offered to the families of their community. The benefits of these programs affect the entire community as well as individual children and families. Communities should offer programs that are consistent with the needs and characteristics of their families. Programs should be appropriate for the ages of the children and the hours that are needed. For example, if a community consists of a lot of parents who report to work earlier than school starts, then the community should provide care that begins in early morning hours, as well as after-school needs. Communities should also be invested in providing the appropriate facilities for after-school care programs.

In order to make these programs available and accessible to families, the issue of transportation needs to be addressed. This is another service that the community can offer to its families. If programs offered to children are far from the schools, then children need safe and reliable transportation to these programs.

Since parents are the ones who ultimately make the decisions regarding how their children spend their after-school time, they should be aware of the developmental outcomes associated with each type of care. When considering the use of self-care, parents should also be aware of factors that should be considered such as neighborhood safety and child comfort with being left alone. Each state should have a protocol for how emergencies are to be handled and how a child can contact a responsible adult if in need of supervision. Children should also have check-in times with an adult or parent to allow for indirect supervision of the children's activities.

These recommendations are designed to better ensure that the children of our society are safe and engaged in productive activities during the out of school hours. In addition, these recommendations will also help to ensure that our children are thriving in these settings.

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