The Link between Early Childhood Education and Crime and Violence Reduction

High quality early learning and care is one of the most powerful weapons against crime, while poor early childhood education multiplies the risk that children will grow up to be a threat to every American family.

Quality Child Care Cuts Crime
Powerful evidence from one study after another proves that high quality care in the first years of life can greatly reduce the risk that today’s babies and toddlers will become tomorrow’s violent teens and adults.¹

New research on Chicago’s government-funded Child-Parent Centers tracked 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in the program for 15 years.² Children who did not participate in the preschool program were 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18. This confirms similar results from the High/Scope Perry preschool program.³ A 22-year study of this program showed that leaving at-risk children out of this program multiplied by five times the risk that they would become chronic lawbreakers as adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Parent Centers: Violent Arrest by Age 18</th>
<th>High Scope/Perry Preschool: Chronic Offenders (over 4 arrests) at Age 27</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth who received preschool program</td>
<td>Youth who received preschool program</td>
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<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Those who did not</td>
<td>Those who did not</td>
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<tr>
<td>15%</td>
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Children from child care centers receiving assistance from North Carolina’s Smart Start quality improvement program were half as likely as comparison children to rate poorly on behavior problems in kindergarten.⁴ This is important because research consistently shows that children who exhibit problem behaviors in the early grades are at far greater risk than other children of becoming teen delinquents and adult criminals.⁵

Large national studies show that at-risk kids who attended quality child care programs had no more behavior problems at age eight than did children of college-educated moms.⁶ But those at-risk kids who received poor quality care had significantly more problem behaviors.

Prevention Results in Cost Savings
Investments in early childhood education lead to large economic savings. The Child-Parent Center program has served 100,000 Chicago kids and will prevent an estimated 13,000 violent juvenile crimes. It is saving taxpayers, victims, and participants over $7 for every $1 invested, without counting pain and suffering from crimes. A study released by Vanderbilt University estimates that the potential benefits in saving a high-risk youth from becoming a typical career criminal are between $1 and $1.3 million.⁷
Law Enforcement is Supportive

Law enforcement is united in its support of early childhood education as a strategy for crime prevention. In a recent survey conducted by George Mason University, when police chiefs were asked to rate various strategies “on their value as a crime prevention tool,” high quality early learning and care was given the highest rating for effectiveness by three to ten times more chiefs than such alternatives as trying more juveniles as adults, building more juvenile detention facilities, or installing more metal detectors in schools. Nearly 9 out of 10 police chiefs said that America could greatly reduce crime by expanding quality child care programs.


