Children with disabilities tend to stay in a highly-resourced Early Head Start/Head Start program longer than children without disabilities

Alan Cobos-Lewis, Dana Walker, Noreen Yazejian, Shinyoung Jeon, Sandra Hong, Karen Stolber, Diane Horm, Gabriela Guerero, Donna Bryant

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Methods
We used a statistical technique called Proportion generalised mixed models to make the marginal survival analysis assessing the time until exit from Educare until exit from Educare. With these tools, we measured the hazard ratio of entry and the exit rate of children from 21 Educare schools over a 15-year period. We focused on how entry into Educare programs affects the survival of children with disabilities vs. children without disabilities. We also asked whether these differences are more prominent in children of different racial/ethnicity. We also controlled for primary caregiver’s education, number of life events per year, age of birth, child gender, food insecurity, and caregiver depression.

Results
Timing of Entry into Program
• Children with disabilities entered Educare at a lower rate than children without disabilities. This was more prevalent for younger children.
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Timing of Exit from Program
• Children with disabilities exited Educare at a lower rate than children without disabilities. This was more prevalent for younger children.
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Hazard Ratio (panels on left) describes the risk of entry for children with disabilities divided by the risk of entry for children without disabilities. The hazard ratio is less than one, which means that children with disabilities enter at a lower rate. When the hazard ratio is greater than one, children with disabilities enter at a higher rate. For entry, the hazard ratio is less than 1 at young ages (when children enter Educare at a lower rate) and is greater than 1 around 3 years before kindergarten (when children enter Educare at a higher rate at an average age of 3.97 years) around 3 years before kindergarten (when children enter Educare at a higher rate at an average age of 3.97 years). The hazard ratio peaks at the end of every academic year when children enter Educare at a higher rate (1 at young ages). Entry rate peaks rarely mid-year between semesters.

Survival (panels on right) indicates the proportion children with disabilities and children without disabilities exited Educare or exit Educare. The hazard ratio is less than one, which means that children with disabilities stay in the program longer than children without disabilities. This indicates that children with disabilities exit Educare at a lower rate (tend to remain in program longer once they’ve entered).

Connection to Conference Theme (“Leading Change Together”)
The current study involves a collaborative initiative and in public policy. Educare family advocates (parents of children in Educare) have led the state legislature in support of state funding for early childhood programs in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This was a significant advocacy effort that has helped educate policymakers and citizens about the importance of high-quality early childhood education. Educare is a leading organization in the field of early childhood education, advocating for policies and programs that support children with disabilities and their families.

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