

Experiences in After-School Programs and Children's Well-Being

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Several factors have contributed to the increased attention on after-school programs

- High rates of maternal employment
 - 69% married mothers and 71% single mothers of 6- to 17-year-olds are employed
- Concerns about youth as victims and perpetrators of crime
 - Juvenile crime peaks on weekday afternoons between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.
- Concerns about lagging academic performance

Limitations of Previous Research

- “Evaluation of after-school activities is still limited. Often the information about a program is based on the opinions of experts instead of formal evaluations.” (Working for Children and Families, 2000, p. 7)
- “Circumstances surrounding the type of care provided, the kinds of students who attended the different programs, and what the programs themselves entailed, have rarely been studied in detail.” (Fashola, 1998, p. 3)
- Lack of control for selection factors
- Failure to consider variations in program quality

Components of high-quality after-school programs in middle childhood

- Developmental theory and after-school practitioners argue that high quality after-school programs should provide opportunities to:
 - Master and demonstrate new skills
 - Form good social relationships with peers
 - Form good social relationships with adults outside the family
 - Make independent decisions and control one's own behavior
- Only limited empirical tests of these components are available.

In our prior research, we found:

- Children report less emotional support when after-school staff are more hostile and negative.
- Children report being more satisfied in programs that offer a greater variety of activities.
- Boys display fewer internalizing and externalizing problems in 1st grade when program staff interact more positively with children.
- Boys obtain lower reading and math scores in 1st grade when program staff are more negative during interactions.
- Frequent negative interactions with peers at the program predict more internalizing and externalizing problems, and poorer social skills, at school.
- Children display better social skills when their after-school programs are more flexible.

Research Aims

- To assess the quality of after-school programs from multiple perspectives (child, parent, observer)
- To control for child and family selection factors, including prior child adjustment
- To determine if experiences in after-school programs are related to children's academic performance, social competencies, and emotional well-being in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades
- To determine if program quality has differential effects for boys and girls

Sample Recruitment

- Approached **all licensed programs** and community centers ($N = 92$)
- Selected **48 programs**
 - Minimum of three 1st graders
 - Enrolled minority race children
 - Equal numbers of for-profit and nonprofit
- 275 parents from **38 programs** returned forms
- **175** 1st graders selected/**150** agreed to participate
 - Attended program at least 3 days per week
 - Half were boys
 - Oversampled minority race children
 - Oversampled single-parent households

Sample Characteristics

	1 st grade	4 th grade
	<i>N</i> = 150	<i>N</i> = 135
Child gender (% boy)	51	48
Child ethnicity (% minority)	13	11
Mother education (% bachelor's or graduate degree)	57	64
1-parent household (%)	25	22
Family income (median)	\$55,000	\$75,000

Program Attendance

	Sample size	% sample enrolled in a program	Days/week attended <i>M (SD)</i>
1 st grade	150	100%	4.57 (0.81)
2 nd grade	145	83%	4.36 (0.98)
3 rd grade	139	66%	4.18 (1.13)
4 th grade	135	44%	3.70 (1.20)

Measures of After-School Program Quality

- Program observations: School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) and qualitative ratings
 - 3 times in 1st grade
 - 4 times in 2nd grade
 - 3 times in 3rd grade
 - 4 times in 4th grade
- Child reports: After-School Environment Scale (ASES)
 - 2 times each year (Fall and Spring)
- Parent reports: Modified After-School Questionnaire
 - 1 time each year (Spring)

School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale

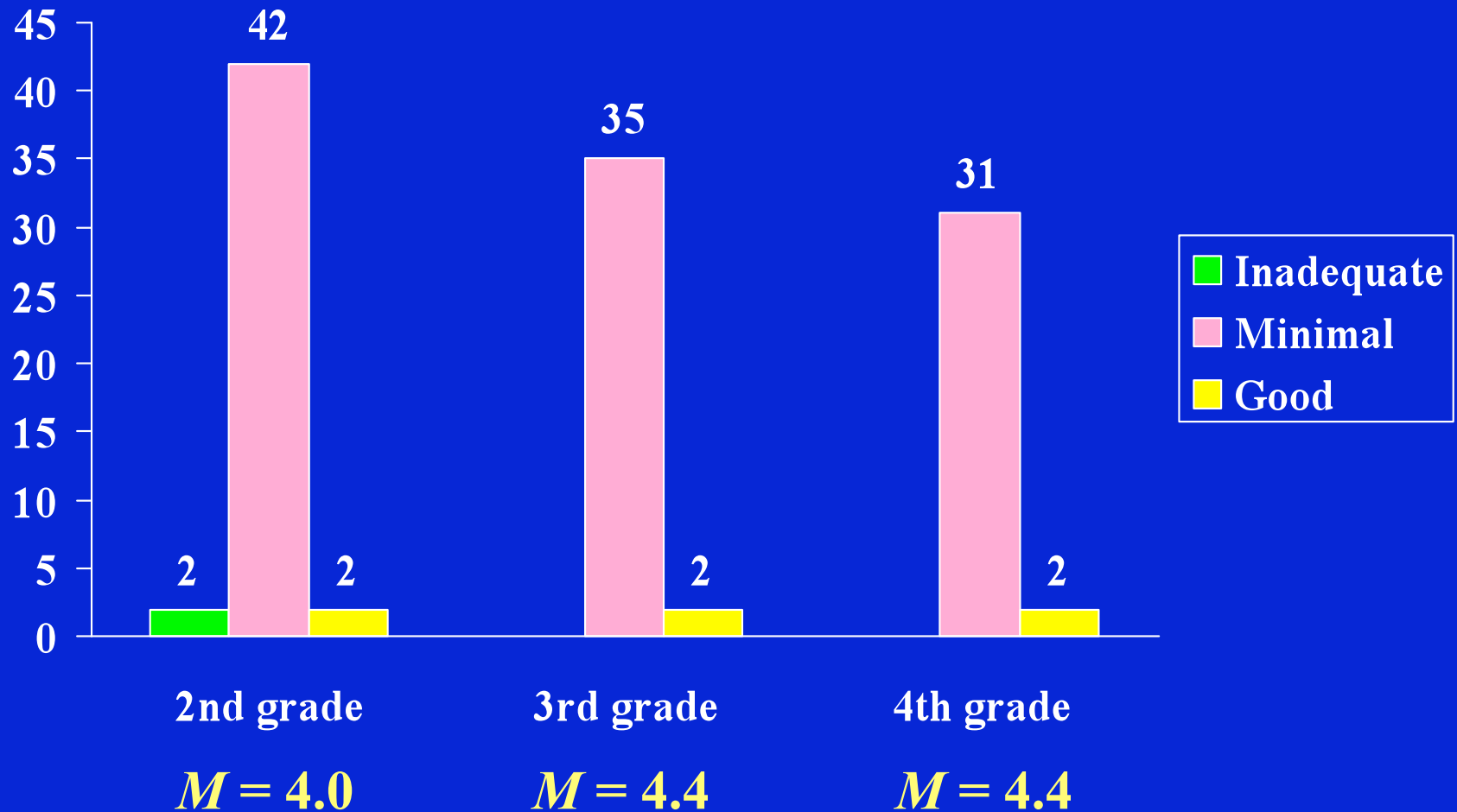
(SACERS; Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996)

- 43 observational and interview items
- Assesses 6 program features
 - Space and furnishings for program activities and for staff
 - Health and safety policies and practices
 - Range of activities
 - Interactions between staff and children, parents, classroom teachers, and other staff
 - Program structure including daily schedule, free choice, use of community resources
 - Staff development including supervision and whether staff meetings are held

SACERS

- Items rated on a 7-point scale
 - 1 = inadequate
 - 3 = minimal
 - 5 = good
 - 7 = excellent
- Collected four times in 2nd grade, three times in 3rd grade, four times in 4th grade
- Scores for each year were averaged to create an annual score.
- Good reliability (M alpha = .77; range = .70 - .87)

Distribution of SACERS Scores



Qualitative Ratings

- **Staff positive regard**

1 = detached, flat, or consistently negative; 4 = strongly positive, warm, accepting

- **Staff negative regard**

1 = no negativity evident in words or expressions; flat or positive affect; 4 = extremely negative, insensitive or harsh

- **Staff uses positive behavior management**

1 = management is negative, ineffective, or nonexistent; 4 = positive attention for “good” behavior; rationales provided

- **Staff uses negative behavior management**

1 = management is positive or nonexistent; 4 = harsh discipline methods, frequent punishment

- **Flexibility of programming**

1 = required participation in planned activities; 4 = autonomous decision making

- **Availability of age-appropriate activities**

1 = limited number of activities; 4 = multiple age-appropriate activities

- **Chaotic setting**

1 = no chaos, activities and transitions proceed smoothly; 4 = chaotic, disorganized

Overall Observed Quality

- Collected three times in 1st and 3rd grades, four times in 2nd and 4th grades
- Ratings averaged to create annual overall observed quality scores (after reflecting negative regard, negative behavior management, and chaos)
- Good reliability (M alpha = .76; range = .61 - .85)

Child Reports of Program Experiences

- After-School Environment Scale (ASES; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996)
- 4-point scale (1 = never, 4 = always)
- Yields overall psychosocial climate score and three subscales:
 - Emotional Support (19 items)
 - The teachers here care about me.
 - I can tell the teachers here about my problems if I need to.
 - Autonomy/Privacy (6 items)
 - There are too many rules to follow here.
 - I get to choose what I want to do here.
 - Positive Peer Relations (6 items)
 - I have lots of friends here.
 - I like the other kids here.

ASES

- Emotional Support scale (18 items) collected in Fall and Spring of 1st and 2nd grades
- Full measure collected in Fall and Spring of 3rd and 4th grades
- Two measurements each year averaged to create annual score
- Excellent reliability for overall climate (M alpha = .92; range = .90-.94)
 - Emotional Support M alpha = .91 (range = .85-.94)
 - Autonomy/Privacy M alpha = .64 (range = .60-.69)
 - Positive Peer Relations M alpha = .83 (range = .81-.86)

Parent Reports of the After-School Programs

- 23 items adapted from the After-School Questionnaire (ASQ; O'Connor, 1991)
- 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
- Sample items:
 - You like the indoor space the program offers.
 - There are enough materials (toys, crafts, games, etc.).
 - The caregiver seems to like and respect your child.
 - The program's hours fit your needs.
 - Your child likes going to the program.
- Collected in Spring of 2nd - 4th grades
- Excellent reliability (M alpha = .93; range = .93-.94)

Cumulative Program Experiences

- Grades 1 + 2 program experiences → 2nd grade functioning
- Grades 1 + 2 + 3 program experiences → 3rd grade functioning
- Grades 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 program experiences → 4th grade functioning

Measures of Child Functioning

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Measure</u>
Academic grades	T	Mock Report Card
Work habits	T	(Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell)
Social Skills	T	
Externalizing	M, T	Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach)
Internalizing	M, T	Teacher's Report Form (TRF; Achenbach)
Loneliness	C	Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw)
Depression	C	Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs)

Analytic Plan

- Model 1: Child and family characteristics
 - Child gender
 - Prior child adjustment (measured in 1st grade)
 - Firm but responsive parenting (measured cumulatively)
 - Family income (measured cumulatively)
- Model 2: Cumulative program experience added
- Model 3: Cumulative program experience X child gender added

Academic Grades

	Grade 2 <i>N</i> = 105	Grade 3 <i>N</i> = 74	Grade 4 <i>N</i> = 47
Model 1 (R^2)	.533***	.454***	.536***
Child & family characteristics			
Model 2 (change in R^2)	.037**	.051**	<i>ns</i>
Qualitative ratings composite			
Model 3 (change in R^2)	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	.033 $p < .08$
Ratings composite X gender			stronger for girls

Work Habits

	Grade 2 <i>N</i> = 105	Grade 3 <i>N</i> = 74	Grade 4 <i>N</i> = 47
Model 1 (R^2)	.465***	.353***	.569***
Child & family characteristics			
Model 2 (change in R^2)	<i>ns</i>	.033 $p < .06$	<i>ns</i>
Qualitative ratings composite			
Model 3 (change in R^2)	<i>ns</i>	.045*	.049*
Ratings composite X gender		stronger for girls	stronger for girls

Social Skills

	Grade 2 <i>N</i> = 105	Grade 3 <i>N</i> = 74	Grade 4 <i>N</i> = 47
Model 1 (R^2)	.427***	.387***	.304**
Child & family characteristics			
Model 2 (change in R^2)	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Qualitative ratings composite			
Model 3 (change in R^2)	<i>ns</i>	.061**	.043*
Ratings composite X gender		stronger for girls	stronger for girls

Loneliness

	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
	<i>N</i> = 119	<i>N</i> = 89	<i>N</i> = 57
Model 1 (R^2)	.249***	.493**	.315**
Child & family characteristics			
Model 2 (change in R^2)	NA	.030*	.095**
Child satisfaction			
Model 3 (change in R^2)	NA	.021*	<i>ns</i>
Child satisfaction X gender		stronger for girls	

Loneliness

	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
	<i>N</i> = 119	<i>N</i> = 89	<i>N</i> = 57
Model 2B (change in R^2)	.085**	.106***	.201***
Emotional support (beta)	-.314**		-.393*
Peer affiliation (beta)	NA	-.345***	-.335*
Autonomy (beta)	NA		-.266 $p < .06$

Depression

	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
	<i>N</i> = 119	<i>N</i> = 90	<i>N</i> = 57
Model 1 (R^2)	.372***	.251***	.280***
Child & family characteristics			
Model 2 (change in R^2)	NA	.085**	.042 $p < .08$
Child satisfaction			
Model 3 (change in R^2)	NA	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Child satisfaction X gender			

Depression

	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
	<i>N</i> = 119	<i>N</i> = 90	<i>N</i> = 57

Model 2B (change in R ²)	.095***	.163***	.128*
Emotional support (beta)	-.344**		
Peer affiliation (beta)	NA	-.336***	-.274*
Autonomy (beta)	NA		

Conclusions

- According to one well-known measure of program quality (the SACERS), most of the programs we observed were of minimal quality.
- Even in this restricted range, we found effects on children's academic performance, social competence, and emotional well-being associated with other quality measures.
 - Higher observed quality (positive emotional climate, flexible programming, age-appropriate activities) predicted higher academic grades in 2nd and 3rd grades for boys and girls.
 - Higher observed quality predicted better work habits and better social skills at school in 3rd and 4th grades for girls.
 - Children who were more satisfied with their after-school program were less lonely and less depressed in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades.

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