

Universal Early Childhood Education and Adolescent Risky Behavior*

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Abstract

Despite the large social benefits, the evidence for the effects of early childhood education on risky behavior in adolescence is limited. This paper studies the consequences of a reform of a large-scale universal kindergarten program serving more than 1.4 million children in Japan. Exploiting the staggered expansion of kindergartens across regions, we estimate the effects of the reform using the event study model. The estimates indicate that the reform significantly reduced the violent arrests of juveniles and the rate of teenage pregnancy, but did not increase the high school enrollment rate, which contradicts the “incarceration” hypothesis. We argue that improved non-cognitive skills can account for the reduction of risky behavior in adolescence.

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