Are Children Healthier and Safer in Highly Compliant Early Care and Education Programs?

Technical Research Note #99

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The title to this short Technical Research Note (#99) is the key question regarding regulatory compliance in the human service licensing field, in particular, in early care and education. The ultimate mission or mandate for human service licensing is to do “no harm”, to make sure children are safe and healthy. But to date, the human services licensing/regulatory science field has few, if any, empirical demonstrations that there is a relationship between regulatory compliance and health and safe outcomes for children. In the early care and education (ECE) research literature there are many examples of comparing ECE quality with child developmental outcomes but not health & safety.

This brief Technical Research Note will provide the reader with the first demonstration of such a relationship between regulatory compliance and health & safety outcomes. It comes out of an expanding research literature in human service licensing and regulatory science (http://naralicensing.org/key-indicators).

The variables selected as outcome variables are the levels of child immunizations (proxy for health outcome) and having a child care environment that is hazard free (proxy for safety outcome). These two variables have been and can be both process as well as outcome variables and have been used primarily as process variables in the past within human service licensing systems and specific rules/regulations have been written to capture the essence of each.

The regulatory compliance measures are drawn from key indicator and risk assessment methods being utilized in differential monitoring systems in such states/provinces as Washington, Indiana, and Saskatchewan.

The results reported here are from the most recent validation study completed in the Province of Saskatchewan, Canada. The results clearly indicate a relationship between overall regulatory compliance with key indicator and risk assessment standards/rules and children being properly immunized ($r = .39$; $p < .02$) as well as with specific hazard or unsafe situations in which hazardous items are not accessible to children ($r = .34 - .53$; $p < .05 - .001$).

It is now possible based upon these results to begin to piece together the overall importance of having regulatory compliance at a high level in order to ensure the health and safety of children in early care and education programs. The methodology used for this study, for the validation studies, and the development and implementation of the key indicator, risk assessment, and differential monitoring methodologies are available on the following website (http://rikinstitute.com).