HOT TOPICS

Fixing a Fat Nation: Why Diets and Gyms Won’t Save Us from the Obesity Epidemic

Today there are 5.4 million overweight American children, and another 7 million are considered at risk of joining them. Most will agree that childhood obesity is a serious problem in America today. What is being debated is how to fight this growing epidemic. RAND researchers recently co-authored an article, “Fixing a Fat Nation: Why Diets and Gyms Won’t Save Us from the Obesity Epidemic,” that looks at both childhood and adult obesity and offers key suggestions for policymakers. This article appeared in The Washington Monthly.

Accountability for After-School Care: Devising Standards and Measuring Adherence to Them

Federal and state funding for after-school care will continue to increase in the coming years due to the fact that more and more children are without adult supervision after school because of parents’ work schedules. Megan Beckett, the lead investigator in a RAND study of these programs, briefed Congressional staff on the major findings in October. She discussed how the number of these programs rose quickly without much, if any, convincing evidence about their outcomes or established guidelines for implementing them. In the study, RAND researchers identified generally accepted quality indicators and developed a tool to measure a program’s adherence to these indicators. This study will be useful for policymakers as they begin to evaluate “promising practices” for after-school care.

Consequences of Welfare Reform: A Research Synthesis

As work on reauthorizing the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation continues into the 108th Congress, one of the core issues is how reforms affect children—an issue that RAND examined in a recently released synthesis on the consequences of welfare reform. The overarching conclusion is that the knowledge base is limited in the area of child well-being. What knowledge we have points to evidence of both positive and negative effects and to variation by child age. The most favorable effects are associated with financial work incentives, most likely because income increases when work and welfare are combined. Work requirements do not appear to have strong favorable or unfavorable impacts on grade-school-age children. However, both policies are associated with unfavorable outcomes for adolescents, especially their achievement problems in the case of parental work requirements.

Understanding the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents

Understanding adolescent sexual behavior is an important step in preventing teen pregnancy and the spread of disease. As part of an ongoing program of research on risk behavior, RAND researchers examined the range of adolescent sexual activity. They gathered data about the sexual behavior of adolescents in a socioeconomically diverse area, providing some of the first empirical information about the sexual practices of a population-based sample of high-school-aged virgins. The researchers also used this information to evaluate how a condom availability program affected adolescents’ attitudes and behavior.

PROJECTS UNDER WAY

Examining Behavioral Reactions Following Indirect Exposure to Terrorism

This study re-interviews families interviewed immediately after the attacks on 9/11 to learn how well they and their children are coping, where they are turning for help, and what their experiences might imply for addressing terrorist-related stress symptoms.

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