The early risers programme improved academic competence in children at high risk of aggressive behaviour


QUESTION: In children at high risk of aggressive behaviour during the kindergarten year, is an early risers programme effective?

Design
2 year cluster randomised (unclear allocation concealment*), unblinded*, controlled trial.

Setting
20 demographically matched elementary schools at 2 regional sites in Minnesota, USA.

Participants
245 children (mean age 7 y, 69% boys) who were at high risk of aggressive behaviour during the kindergarten year, with a T score >58 on the 25 item aggressive scale of the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) teacher rating form (using sex specific norms) or with a T score ≥85th percentile relative to all kindergarten students in their school without dropping below a T score of 55. Exclusion criteria included an intelligence quotient <80. Follow up was 100%.

Main results
Academic competence improved over a period of 2 years in the intervention group, but declined slightly in the control group (difference in change from baseline for effect size 0.26, p < 0.018). Improvement in behavioural self regulation (10 scales from 2 parent and 2 teacher measures), social competence (3 scales from teacher and parent BASCTRS), and parent investment in child (Alabama Parenting Questionnaire) measured at baseline and annually for 2 years.

Conclusion
In children at high risk of aggressive behaviour during the kindergarten year, an early risers programme improved overall academic competence but not social competence or parental investment.

*See glossary.