

What About The Children?



RESEARCH SUMMARY

The influence of different forms of early childcare on children's emotional and behavioural development at school entry. (2012)

Stein, A., Malmberg, L-E., Leach, P., Barnes, J., Sylva, K. and FCCC Team.

Child: care, health and development. 39, (5),676-687.

In the last few decades there has been a significant reduction in maternal childcare matched by an increase in non-maternal childcare. This research looks at the effects on the child's emotional and behavioural responses to those two childcare scenarios. In both cases, the quality of the childcare is assessed by analysing the mother's own assessment of the child's behaviour in the home and the teacher's assessment of behaviour in the classroom.

Data was collected from families recruited from antenatal clinics in London and Oxford. The mean age of the mothers at the birth of their child was 30 years. Assessments of the families took place at 3 months to assess post-birth experiences, 10 months to assess mobility and attachment, 18 months when language begins, 36 months when most families take up free nursery places, and 51 months when some form of schooling begins. Maternal caregiving was monitored at 10, 18 and 36 months. Maternal health problems were assessed, as was parental stress. The average number of childcare hours was determined for each child over the periods 0-18 months and 19-51 months. The quality of non-parental care was assessed using standard tests. The emotional and behavioural development of the child was determined using Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs). Statistical analysis using a structure equation model was used to determine the fit of data to the models.

Statistically significant results, using just types of childcare, from the maternal SDQ reports (n=991) can be summarised, for home variables and gender, in all the following 20 bullet points:

- A lower socio-demographic status of the mother was associated with less pro-social behaviour and more conduct problems for the child.
- More maternal health problems were associated with peer problems of the child.
- More parental stress was associated with child hyperactivity.

In contrast to the above points, good quality maternal care was associated with:

- Better pro-social behaviour.
- Few peer problems.
- Less hyperactivity.

In both groups, girls were more pro-social and less hyperactive than boys.

The effect of different types of childcare could be summarised as:

- More time in day-care centres was a predictor for hyperactivity.
- More time in pre-school playgroups was associated with fewer peer problems.
- More time with a nanny was associated with more pro-social behaviour

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In contrast:

- More time in child-minding was associated with hyperactivity.
- More time with grandparents was associated with more peer problems.

Teacher reports (n=966) were derived from a different environment from maternal reports, although they may be more objective in their assessments. For home variables and gender, better quality maternal care-giving was associated with fewer peer problems. Girls showed more pro-social behaviour, less conduct problems and less hyperactivity than boys. The effect of different types of child-care can be summarised as:

- Children with more time in day-care centres were associated with more hyperactivity.
- Children with day-care by child minders were associated with peer problems.

A second analysis was performed in order to determine the effects of the quality of childcare on emotional and behavioural development of the child. The data was a subset of the data used above. Maternal reports (n=471) in this sample suggested that:

- Better maternal care-giving predicted for less hyperactivity.

With the Teacher reports (n=460), they showed that:

- Increased maternal care-giving quality predicted fewer peer problems, fewer conduct problems and less hyperactivity.
- Children spending more time in day-care centres, or with childminders, showed more total problems and conduct problems.

However, the authors remark that 'the quality of childcare was not significantly related to total scores.' It is not clear from the paper whether the individual components of the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) showed any relationships with child behaviour.

In summary, poor child behaviour is associated with:

- Low maternal care-giving.
- Maternal health and stress problems.
- More time spent in day-care centres.
- More time with child-minders.

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