



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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Children in Center-Based Child Care Have Slightly More Behavior Problems, But for Children in Other Types of Early Child Care, Problems Are Short-Lived

The latest installment of a long-term study of child care in the United States has found that children who spent more time in center-based settings from birth through school entry have somewhat more problems with aggressive and disobedient behavior through sixth grade than children who spent less time in centers, regardless of the quality of care. However, problem behavior and teacher-child conflicts experienced by children who spent extensive time in other types of child care did not continue beyond first grade.

The findings are the latest from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. NICHD is the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The study is published in the March-April 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The study also found that the quality of parenting that children receive is a far stronger and more consistent predictor of achievement and social functioning than children's experiences in early child care. However the study could not determine whether this was due to genes shared by parents and children or the actual parenting experience.

The NICHD study was initiated in 1991 to examine relationships between children's experiences in child care in the first 54 months of life and children's subsequent development. Researchers collected information about child care use every 3 to 4 months from the time infants were 1 month old until they started school. The quality of the children's primary child care setting was assessed when the children were 6, 15, 24, 36, and 54 months. Children's cognitive and social functioning was measured at 4-1/2 years and in first, third, fifth, and sixth grades.

The latest installment of the study, which looked at the children in fifth and sixth grades, sought to determine whether findings pertaining to the quality, quantity, and type of child care measured when the children were 4-1/2 stayed the same, increased, or decreased as the children got older. This study also sought to determine how the relationship between child care and children's development compared to the relationship between parenting quality and children's development.

The latest installment of the study also found that children who experience higher quality early child care have somewhat better vocabularies through fifth grade than children who are enrolled in lower quality care. It also found that math and reading gains made by children who had been in high-quality child care that were thought to last through third grade did not continue beyond first grade.

"The child care effects that endured through the elementary school years were limited in number and modest in strength compared with the effects of parenting," said Jay Belsky, professor of psychology and Director of the Institute for the Study of Children at Birkbeck University of London, and lead author of the study. "However they are noteworthy because of the large number of children in America who experience extensive and/or low quality child care prior to school entry. There may, therefore, be *collective* consequences of small enduring effects of child care—across classrooms, schools, communities, and society at large."

The children in the study will be evaluated again at age 15 to determine further consequences of child care.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 2, *Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?* by Belsky, J (Birkbeck, University of London), Vandell, DL (University of California, Irvine), Burchinal, M (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Clarke-Stewart, AK (University of California, Irvine), McCartney, K (Harvard University), Owen, MT (University of Texas, Dallas), and the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.