

Daycare and Children's Well-Being

Summary

Non-maternal care, the amount of time spent in day-care, and age of entry into daycare were associated with an increased likelihood of behavioral and socio-emotional problems, lower academic achievement, and a greater incidence of childhood diseases. Behavioral problems associated with earlier daycare continued through the middle-school years.

- **Center-Based Daycare and Children's Behavior.** Children who attended daycare centers tend to exhibit more behavioral problems. Compared with peers who were cared for by their parents, children who attended a daycare center had poorer social skills, including less self-control, lower levels of interpersonal skills, and the tendency to externalize problem behavior through fighting, arguing, expressing anger, acting impulsively, and disturbing classroom activity.¹
- **Age at Entry in Daycare.** Both the age of entry into daycare and quantity of time spent in non-parental care was associated with the level of children's problem behavior. Compared with peers in parental care, children cared for in day care centers tended to exhibit more behavioral problems, and these problems were more pronounced the earlier the children entered center care and the more hours they spent in the center each week. This was true for children in families of all income levels studied.²
- **Hours Spent in Non-Parental Care.** Children who spend more time in daycare are more likely to exhibit negative behavior. Even after controlling for socioeconomic status, family stress, and child gender, the amount of time spent in day care was a significant predictor of higher scores on negative roles and behaviors and lower scores on positive roles and behaviors for children entering kindergarten.³
- **Non-Parental Care of Infants.** Daycare during infancy was linked to children's cognitive skills and levels of behavioral problems. Children of mothers who were employed before they were one year old exhibited lower levels of cognitive scores (assessed through Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-R) and higher levels of behavioral problems (assessed through the Behavioral Problems Index) at age three and four.⁴
- **Maternal Attachment.** Extensive daycare experience in the first year of life is associated with infants having an insecure attachment with their mothers. Of infants who experienced more than 20 hours a week of non-maternal care, 43 percent were classified as "insecure," whereas 26 percent of infants who experienced less than 20 hours per week of non-parental care (including none) were classified as insecure. Similarly, sons who experienced more than 35 hours per week of non-maternal care were more likely to have insecure attachments to their fathers.⁵
- **Maternal Employment.** Children of full-time working mothers are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems. Four- to six-year-olds whose mothers worked a significant number of

hours each week tended to exhibit more socio-emotional difficulties and problem behaviors than other peers. Early and extensive maternal employment was the strongest predictor of socio-emotional functioning, exceeding poverty and maternal education. Early and extensive maternal employment was associated with increased behavioral problems, less compliance, and insecurity.⁶

- ***Daycare and Parenting in At-Risk Families.*** Compared with other parents in at-risk families, those who rely extensively on daycare for their infants tend to provide less parental guidance and control. An extensive reliance on daycare by at-risk families during their child's first year (more than 20 hours per week) was correlated with subsequent family problems, a parenting style that least frequently entailed guidance and control, and children's defiant behavior when parental controls were enforced.⁷
- ***Long-Term Effects of Daycare in Centers.*** The amount of time spent in a daycare center was related to children's long-term behavioral problems. Children who spent more time in daycare centers in early childhood were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, even through the sixth grade.⁸
- ***Cumulative Effect of Daycare.*** The quantity of time spent in daycare in infancy and preschool years was linked to children's subsequent school performance and behavior. Children who had more extensive child care experience since infancy were rated by teachers and parents as having poorer work habits, peer relationships, and emotional health, and as being more difficult to discipline. When controlling for family social class, parents' marital status, family size, number of family moves, child gender, childhood birth order, and current after school care, children's extensive experience in infant care was the single best predictor of negative ratings by parents, teachers

and peers, and of lower grades and standardized test scores.⁹

- ***Daycare and Children's Health.*** Center-based daycare is related to children's health problems. Compared with peers who were cared for at home, preschoolers who attended daycare centers used health-care services more often. Daycare children were at greater risk of contracting both minor communicable illnesses and more significant medical problems such as hepatitis, injuries, and chronic otitis media (ear infections). They were three times more likely to have made at least one visit to a doctor's office, twice as likely to have visited an emergency room, and almost three times as likely to have received a prescription medication. This increased use of health services resulted in health-care expenditures for daycare children that were, on average, \$343 higher per child each year.¹⁰

Endnotes

- 1 Lisa N. Hickman, "Who Should Care for Our Children?," *Journal of Family Issues* 27, No. 5 (2006): 652-684.
- 2 Susanna Loeb, Margaret Bridges, Daphna Bassok, Bruce, Fuller, and Russell W. Rumberger, "How Much Is Too Much? The Influence of Preschool Centers on Children's Social and Cognitive Development," *Economics of Education Review* 26, (2007): 52-66.
- 3 J. E. Bates, D. Marvinney, T. Kelly, K. A. Dodge, D.S. Bennett, and G. S. Pettit, "Child Care History and Kindergarten Adjustment," *Developmental Psychology* 30, (1994): 690-700.
- 4 N. Baydar and J. Brooks-Gun, "Effects of Maternal Employment and Child Care Arrangements on Preschoolers' Cognitive and Behavioral Outcomes: Evidence from the Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth," *Developmental Psychology* 27, (1991): 932-945.
- 5 Jay Belsky, "Infant Day Care and Socioemotional Development: The United States," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 29, No. 4 (1988): 397-406.
- 6 J. Belsky and D. Eggebeen, "Early and Extensive Maternal Employment and Young Children's Socioeconomic Development: Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53, (1991): 1083-1110.
- 7 J. Belsky, S. Woodworth, and K. Crnic, "Trouble in the Second Year: Three Questions About Family Interaction," *Child Development* 67, (1996): 556-578.
- 8 Jay Belsky, Margaret Burchinal, Kathleen McCartney, and Deborah Lowe Vandell, "Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?" *Child Development*. 78, No. 2. (March/April 2007): 681-701.

9 D. L. Vandell and M. A. Corasiniti, "Variations in early child care: Do they predict subsequent social, emotional, and cognitive differences?" *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 5, (1990): 555-572.

10 Michael Silverstein, Anne E. Sales, and Thomas D. Koepsell, "Health Care Utilization and Expenditures Associated with Child Care Attendance: A Nationally Representative Sample" *Pediatrics* 111, No. 4 (April 2003): e317-e375.



Family & Religion

This product is part of the Family and Religion Initiative, one of 10 Transformational Initiatives making up The Heritage Foundation's Leadership for America campaign. Family and religion are foundational to American freedom and the common good.