

The Effects of Day Care on the Social-Emotional Development of Children

Summary

The time children spend in day care is associated with negative effects in social development. More hours in day care during a child's early years is associated with less social competence and cooperation, more problem behaviors, negative mood, aggression, and conflict. Negative effects of day care on social-emotional development persist throughout early childhood and adolescence. Day care is linked with poorer average outcomes when children spend more time in center care, enter day care at an earlier age, or are in lower-quality care. Maternal sensitivity is strongly linked to the effects of day care on children's social development and is the most crucial predictor of children's development, even when children spend long hours in day care.

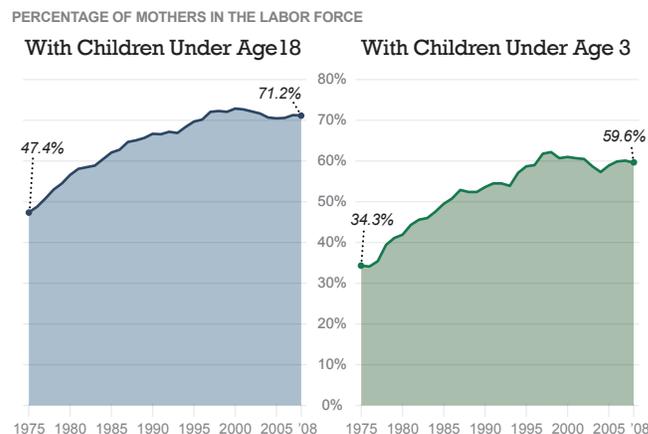
Time spent in non-maternal child care (day care) is strongly linked to children's social-behavioral development. Entry into child care before the age of one and continued and extensive child care throughout early childhood years are associated with less social competence and cooperation, more problem behaviors, negative moods, aggression, and conflict. In teachers' reports of kindergarteners' social behavior, the effect of hours spent in day care is greater than the effect of the quality of parenting and comparable to the impact of poverty. Moreover, the negative effects of hours spent in non-maternal care remain throughout childhood and adolescence.

Maternal sensitivity is the strongest and most consistent predictor of children's social-behavioral adjustment throughout development. When a low level of maternal sensitivity is coupled with more time spent in day care and/or a lower quality of day care, children tend to experience insecurity in their attachment to their mothers. A secure mother-child attachment is associated with positive peer interactions, social behaviors, emotions, and exploratory behaviors. Children are most likely to experience healthy social-

FACT:

Seven in 10 mothers with children under age 18 are in the labor force

Since 1975, the share of working mothers has increased by 50 percent. The share of working mothers with young children has increased even more, by nearly 75 percent.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009.

emotional development when they are secure in their attachment to their mothers and when their mothers exhibit sensitivity throughout their childhood.¹

Major Findings

- Children who spend more hours per week in non-maternal child care are more likely to exhibit problematic social-behavioral adjustment, including less social competence and cooperation and more problem behaviors, negative moods, aggression, and conflict. In teachers' reports of kindergartners' social adjustment, the effect of hours spent in non-maternal care prior to kindergarten is comparable to the effect of poverty in predicting behavioral problems.
- Negative effects associated with quantity of child care persist throughout development. Children who experienced more hours of child care had significantly fewer social skills and poorer work habits in the third grade. In the sixth grade, children who had experienced more center care continued to show more problem behaviors. At age 15, children who had experienced more non-relative (non-family) child care reported more risk-taking behaviors and impulsivity, including using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs; behaving in ways that threatened safety; and not being able to control impulses appropriately.
- Better child care quality is associated with some positive social behavioral effects, including fewer problem behaviors in measures at age 15 years. But child care quality is significantly less important in either positive or negative social and emotional outcomes than quantity of child care.
- Mothers whose children spend more time in non-maternal care are likely to exhibit lower levels

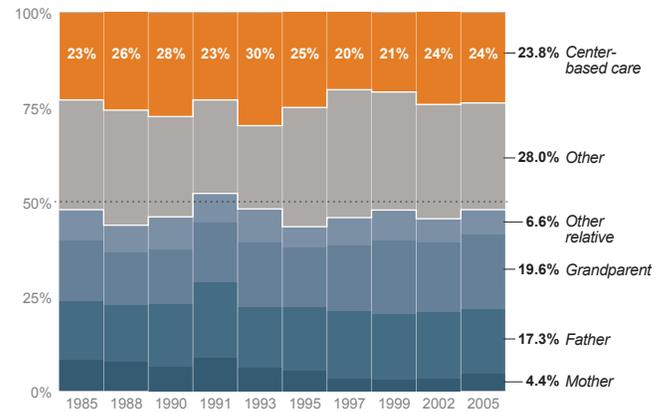
of sensitivity and less positive mother-child interactions, regardless of the quality and stability of the child care.

FACT:

Nearly one in four children with a working mother goes to day care

Trends in child care arrangements for working mothers have remained relatively stable since 1985.

PRIMARY CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN AGE 0 TO 4 WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS



Source: Childstats.gov, America's Children: Key Indicators of National Wellbeing, 2010.

- Children whose mothers exhibit low levels of sensitivity and who are in child care more than 10 hours a week or in lower-quality child care are more likely to experience attachment insecurity.
- Attachment insecurity is associated with negative social-behavioral outcomes across development. Children who do not establish secure attachments in their relationship with their mothers are more likely to experience social withdrawal, depression, and anxiety. Boys with an insecure maternal attachment are more likely to exhibit conflict, aggression, and acting out.

¹ These findings were documented in a FamilyFacts.org Report by Jenet Jacob Erickson, researcher specializing in maternal and child wellbeing and former assistant professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University. Her report reviewed key findings from 30 years of research on child care and children's social-emotional development.



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