Child daycare: A challenge to which we have yet to rise [1]

Question: Is daycare good or bad? Answer: it's complicated
Author: Shpancer, N.
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Introduction

A majority of U.S. children will spend time in some form of nonparental care before age five. While nonparental childcare is, statistically speaking, a current cultural norm, it has not quite eclipsed stay-at-home parental care as a cultural ideal. Therefore, while most mothers with infants are in the labor force, working American mothers still contend often with ambivalence, guilt, and social attitudes that may characterize them as less warm and committed than stay-at-home mothers.

As nonparental childcare has grown, child development researchers have become increasingly invested in learning about the implications of this form of care for children, their parents, and society at large. Early daycare research focused mostly on comparing home-reared and daycare children, looking to address fears that nonparental care might harm young children by disrupting their attachment relationships with their parents, undermining parental influence, or stunting their emotional and intellectual development. Early researchers were also interested in whether professional child caregivers could develop deep, nurturing bonds with the children in their care to provide them with quality interpersonal experiences necessary for healthy development.

In recent decades, with accumulating evidence showing that the "home-reared" and "daycare-reared" labels were not in themselves predictive of developmental outcome, research has begun to focus on mapping how child and parent characteristics, environmental conditions, and the cultural milieu interact to produce developmental outcomes in children across care arrangements. We understand today that child development occurs—and should be understood and studied—in a multidimensional context, where both proximal (e.g., the home and daycare environments) and distal (e.g., governmental childcare policies; parental work stress) conditions interact to shape developmental trajectories.
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