

Long hours spent in ECEC don't make children's behaviour worse study finds ^[1]

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A new study of more than 10,000 preschoolers from five countries around the world has found that young children who spend extended hours in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings are not at greater risk for behavioural problems.

Published in *Child Development*, the study explored data on preschoolers enrolled in seven studies from five countries in North America and Europe, finding that longer periods spent in centre-based care was not tied to overt antisocial behaviour in toddlers and preschoolers.

Based on teacher and parent reports, the international investigators found no increase in "externalising" behaviours, like bullying, picking fights, hitting, biting, kicking, hair pulling, and even restlessness.

"This is reassuring given that trends in child-care use and parental participation in the labor force are likely to remain stable," researchers said.

The study also found no evidence that socioeconomic status such as household income and mother's educational level changed the effect of time a child spent in centre-based care.

"Given the existing evidence of long-term achievement benefits of early childhood care and education for children, I think our findings speak to both the direct positive effects that attending childcare might have on children and also the indirect positive effects through their parents being able to participate in the workforce without the fear of any harmful effects to their child," authors argue.

For nearly 40 years, researchers have debated whether time in centre-based childcare directly causes children to develop behavioral problems, with disagreements proving difficult to settle because the vast majority of studies done are purely 'correlational,' leaving open many alternative explanations as to why children who spend large amounts of time in centre-based care could be at risk other than centre based care per se, the researchers said.

Regardless of care settings – whether centre-based, other nonparental care, or parental care – quality is key, the authors note. with undesirable reactions more likely in children whose needs are not being met.

"Then you are more likely to see maladaptive and stressed behaviors such as aggression, acting out, and mood dysregulation," they explained.

"Quality childcare scaffolds children so they can learn to identify and describe emotions and negotiate increasingly complex social situations. It can also help preschoolers develop friendships and understand the experiences of others."

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

Tags: child development ^[5]

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