

Children 'do not suffer if mothers go out to work' [GB]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Children of working mothers are as happy, stimulated and emotionally stable as those of stay-at-home parents, a long-term study has concluded.

Researchers rejected theories that babies and toddlers who were looked after by childminders or put into daycare would lag behind those cared for by their mothers.

They found that child care could have positive effects. At six months old, babies whose mothers had stayed at home were more likely to be emotional, fretful and difficult than those whose mothers had gone back to work. And in families where both parents worked, the father was more likely to involve himself with the child.

The findings come from a long-term study of 14,000 children and their parents as part of the "Children of the 90s" project at Bristol University, looking at the development of children born in 1991 and 1992.

Researchers asked mothers how often and in which ways they stimulated their children at six months and three years old with actions such as cuddling and reading stories. The responses were added together to produce a "stimulation rating" for mothers who worked, then compared with those who did not & and the two groups scored exactly the same.

Mothers were also asked to assess their child's emotional state at four weeks, six months, 24 months and three years.

There was no difference between the children of working mothers and women who stayed at home for any age groups except for babies at six months. At that stage, non-working mothers were more likely to say that their children were fretful and difficult.

Research from the United States, published last year, found that the children of women who returned to work shortly after giving birth were more likely to be slow developers. Three-year-olds whose mothers had gone back to full-time employment within nine months of the birth scored worst in tests on colours, letters, shapes and verbal skills.

But with 58 per cent of mothers with children under five now working full or part time, campaigners say the debate should shift from whether it is better to stay at home to one over the standard of child care.

Stephen Burke, the director of the Daycare Trust, said: "There is currently one childcare place for every seven children under the age of eight, and that is unacceptable.

"What we need to high-quality, affordable daycare and a system of proper parental leave so that people can choose whether to stay at home or go back to work without having to worry that it will have a negative impact on their children."

-Reprinted from The Independent [UK]

Related link: Working mums & The great debate (University of Bristol)^[2]

Tags: child development^[3]

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