

Daycare moves can be tough on kids ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A study of more than 1,300 young children finds that shifting from one day care setting to another can have a negative effect on a child's ability to make social connections by the time they're in kindergarten.

However, the researchers found no evidence that a change in teachers has any lasting negative effects.

"Our findings showed that when young children moved between child care settings, these transitions negatively affected their social adjustment," says Mary Bratsch-Hines, investigator with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"It turns out that if you put the facts into the context of a theory, the kids learn not only the facts, but they also understand the full explanation," Deborah Kelemen says. "And they get it beyond a level we ever imagined they would, given how young they are."

The study suggest that violent crime rates affect the amount of material learned by the entire student body, but not the study skills or effort of individual students. GPAs reflect learning and individual student behavior, whereas test scores measure content knowledge.

"But when children had a history of changing caregivers within the same setting, we found no significant effects."

Previous research has shown that forming stable and secure early relationships with parents and caregivers serves as a working model for children as they form social connections later.

"It follows that higher levels of instability and disruption in establishing strong relationships with caregivers during children's earliest years could lead to difficulties forming trusting relationships down the road," Bratsch-Hines says. "However, we have to recognize that changing child care settings and providers may be inevitable for a majority of families."

Ups and downs in income, availability of transportation, secure employment, and other factors can result in children moving into and out of different child care settings. But understanding the effects of such transitions on children has remained elusive.

Teacher turnover:

A new study, published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, takes a comprehensive look at the impact of child care by examining the experiences of nearly 1,300 young children living in high-poverty rural areas, focusing on changes in child care both within and across settings-an approach few prior studies have attempted.

"In our study, we also included infants and toddlers even if they were enrolled intermittently in child care that their parents did not provide," Bratsch-Hines says. "Previous studies have included only those children who continuously received child care from people other than their parents."

A rigorous accounting of numerous child, family, and child care characteristics, shows that a history of changes in child care across settings negatively impacts children's lives.

"Not unexpectedly, children who experienced more changes in child care settings received lower ratings from their pre-kindergarten teachers on social adjustment," Bratsch-Hines says. "This may be because changing child care locations meant children had to adjust to new physical environments in terms of the buildings, playgrounds, and toys-as well as new routines-in addition to disruptions in relationships with peers, primary caregivers, and other adults."

Stabilize child care:

Although there is a clear negative impact on social adjustment for children who experience child care instability across settings, the effect is small, Bratsch-Hines says.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that infants and toddlers who only experience changes in providers within settings later have difficulty with social adjustment in pre-kindergarten. "This could be good news for parents who worry about high teacher turnover and other changes in staff at their chosen child care setting."

Nonetheless, practical implications of the findings suggest that programs can make additional efforts to integrate children-regardless of their child care history-into their care.

"In addition, child care subsidies could be changed to help parents access stable child care," she says. "With subsidies often tied to parental employment, unstable employment can lead to unstable child care."

Bratsch-Hines says there is a need for more research in order to better understand the role of child care instability-and other factors-on child development.

"It may be that child care instability is another indicator of chaos in families' lives," she says. "We want to be able to best prepare children for the challenges of schooling, and we have to understand all the factors that stand in their way."

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: child development ^[4]

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