

Double Jeopardy: Poorer social-emotional outcomes for children in the NICHD SECCYD experiencing home and child-care environments that confer risk ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Abstract:

Using data from the NICHD SECCYD, the authors examined whether interactions between home and child care quality affect children's social-emotional adjustment at 24, 36, and 54 months. Triadic splits on quality of home and child care were used to examine children in specific ecological niches, with a focus on those who experience the double jeopardy of poor quality home and child care environments. Children in this niche exhibited the highest levels of mother-reported problem behavior and the lowest levels of prosocial behavior. However, there was evidence that children from lower quality home environments were able to benefit from the compensatory influence of high quality child care. We call for policies aimed at the crosscontext influences of protective and risky settings.

Introduction:

Ecological theory is commonly employed as a framework for understanding early risk and protective factors that guide young children's developmental trajectories (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Sameroff, 2000). Relevant findings have highlighted two enduring concepts -- cumulative risk and mesosystem influences -- that guided the current study and have the potential to inform efforts to promote raising healthy children. Starting with the health-focus of the Framingham Study (Dawber, 1980) and elaborated by Sameroff and colleagues to account for psychosocial outcomes (Sameroff, 2000; Sameroff, Seifer, & Zax, 1982), evidence has made it clear that no single risk factor is either necessary or sufficient to cause lasting harm to the child. This directs attention to examining dual- and cumulative-risk models of development (e.g. Sameroff, 2006). Moreover, an examination of cumulative risk necessarily entails studying the multiple contexts that comprise children's immediate experiences and, notably, the links among them. Within the child care field, ecological theory has led investigators to approach this developmental context as inherently neither a source of risk nor of protection, but rather as a context whose influence must be considered in the context of other important influences in the child's life (Phillips, McCartney, & Sussman, 2006). This focus on interconnections or mesosystems has directed research towards examination of the joint developmental influence of home and child care contexts (McCartney, 2006; Phillips, McCartney & Sussman, 2006).

The current study examines niche effects across low- and high-quality home and child care environments to determine the conditions under which young children are most at-risk for early social emotional problems. A niche approach is important for policy purposes given that eligibility criteria for child care programs and subsidies rely on thresholds, rather than continuous indicators, to distinguish children who are and are not in high risk circumstances. We further include a number of important family and child care characteristics for the purpose of utilizing these data to identify promising avenues for promoting healthy development and preventing later disorders. Avenues to be explored include the potential compensatory role of high quality child care and the moderating role of maternal depression.

Region: United States ^[4]

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