

Study challenges childcare myths

By Bronwyn Herbert for The World Today

TWT abc.net.au/worldtoday >

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New research has debunked some of the negative stereotypes of the impact child care may have on a child's development.

Experts from the Australian National University (ANU) have also found evidence that children in centres do better when there are more adult carers.

Many parents are traumatised each day when leaving their child in the care of someone else, afraid there are emotional and behavioural consequences of their decision.

But economist Andrew Leigh says parents should not sweat over it.

"We find that kids in day care are slightly worse on the behavioural outcomes, a few more temper tantrums, but nothing that looks to us to be massive," Professor Leigh said.

"So in some sense, what our study does is debunks both the radical views of the childcare debate.

"Child care is not child abuse, but neither is it a panacea for Australia's ills."

Professor Leigh says data gathered in a longitudinal survey of 5,000 Australian children who are now five years old has found they are only a "smidgen worse off" when not cared for at home.

He says a child in care is likely to have their development delayed by up to two months.

"This is pretty small bickies in the scheme of things," Mr Leigh said.

"You've got to remember that non-parental care also has substantial benefits for parents.

"The big expansion of day care has allowed women to keep in better touch with their jobs, not have to make a choice between motherhood and work.

"It's also important for Australian firms that have benefited from having smart young women able to stay attached to their firms.

"So all that's got to be put in context when thinking about the really small behavioural impacts that we observe in the study.

"My wife and I have a two-year-old who is in part-time day care and we certainly won't be taking him out of day care as a result of these findings."



Researchers says parents shouldn't agonise over placing their children in care. (ABC News: Clarissa Thorpe)

- [Audio: Childcare not harmful: study \(The World Today\)](#)

Staffing ratios

Only last week a Senate inquiry into child care concluded that formal child care at a young age can place a child's social, emotional and behavioural development at risk.

Professor Leigh says his research did not find any long-term scarring effect on the children in the study group.

The ANU researchers also found that wealthy parents are more likely to think child care is bad for their kids.

Professor Leigh says the one measurement of quality that showed up is the importance of having enough staff to care for children.

"Kids in centres with more carers - with a higher carer-child ratio - seem to do better in day care than kids in centres which have fewer carers per child, bigger group sizes. So that's the one quality proxy that shows up," he said.

"Curiously we don't see any effect of accreditation or staff qualifications on the impacts of day care on kids."


Sue Lines represents childcare workers through the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. She says this data further shows the importance of having the right number of staff.

"There is certainly a lot of evidence that shows that where there are more adults and less children that children benefit from that, that that goes hand in hand with good quality programs and high quality staff," Ms Lines said.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is meeting next week and childcare staffing ratios are expected to be on the agenda.

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Childcare isn't the problem, nor the panacea

Carol Nader

December 3, 2009 - 11:24AM

PARENTS need not feel guilty about placing their children in childcare - youngsters are unlikely to be scarred by the experience. But nor will childcare have a dramatically positive effect on a child's life.

This is the message from a keynote speech to be given at a conference in Melbourne today, as the Council of Australian Governments is set to decide next week how to improve the quality of childcare.

An analysis of 2500 children has found that children generally are no better or worse off in childcare than they are at home with a parent.

"Parents shouldn't worry that they're hurting their kids and policymakers shouldn't think that childcare is a panacea. We don't find any big positive effects of childcare," said Andrew Leigh, professor of economics at the Australian National University, who will deliver the keynote address at the Growing Up in Australia conference.

"Day care is not child abuse, and day care is not the solution to Australia's problems," he said.

In Victoria, the legislated childcare supervision ratios are one carer to five babies and toddlers, which is moving to one to four. Victoria has the highest ratio in the country for children over three, which is one carer to 15 children.

Every state until now has set its own standards and COAG is considering whether to have nationally consistent standards to improve the ratio of carers to babies to one to three - which early childhood experts are pushing for - and one to 10 or 11 for children over three.

Professor Leigh used data from a longitudinal study of Australian children showing that three-quarters were in some form of care for differing periods of time, and a quarter were always in parental care. Parents were asked about their child's behaviour, including how much a child screams and throws things when they don't get their way.

He found, somewhat controversially, that the only factor that made a significant difference to the outcome of children in childcare was better supervision ratios - but not staff qualifications.

"Many of our grandparents were raised by high school drop-outs, so we shouldn't automatically assume that qualifications are essential," he told *The Age*.

Community Childcare Victoria executive director Barbara Romeril said other research had shown that the best quality childcare made a significant difference for the most disadvantaged children.

Ms Romeril said that good qualifications were just as important as ratios as they meant better attachment between carers and children. Whether children were in childcare or at home did not matter as much as the environment in which they spent their time, she said.

"Children need to be safe and loved and stimulated whether they're at home with their parents or extended family ... or in a formal childcare setting," Ms Romeril said.

"What makes a difference is whether the environment the child is in is nurturing and supporting. If an environment is dangerous and deprived then that's not good for the child."

At the St Kilda Children's Centre, run by the City of Port Phillip, the supervision ratio is one carer to five babies, while for children over three it is two carers to 23 children - better than the Victorian legislation requires.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/childcare-isnt-the-problem-nor-the-panacea-20091202-k6bb.html>

Childcare kids are more naughty

Daily Telegraph

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Article from: (http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/)

Xanthe Kleinig
December 04, 2009 10:34am

CHILDREN in childcare may be learning to throw tantrums from other youngsters, according to the author of a study that found children looked after by their parents are better behaved.

Andrew Leigh of the Australian National University said children kept home were a "couple of months" ahead when it came to good behaviour.

"They seem to be a smidgin better behaved but the effect isn't big," Professor Leigh said.

Children in childcare were more likely to throw temper tantrums, responded worse to unfamiliar circumstances and gave up more easily, he said.

His research, which used data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children, will be presented at the Growing Up in Australia conference this week.

The survey followed 5000 children born in 2004. When they were aged between two and three, parents were questioned about their behaviour.

"Perhaps kids who are only exposed to their parents do not learn that if you pick up a heavy toy and throw it across the room, it will make a loud noise and utilise attention," he said.

However, it was not clear whether childcare caused the behaviour or whether it was something to do with the sort of parents of the children.

Professor Leigh found children from wealthier and well-educated backgrounds were the most likely to behave badly, while children in centres with higher staff ratios tended to perform better.

But Professor Leigh cautioned parents not to rush into changing their care arrangements.

"This isn't research that should cause parents to pull their kids out of day care. My wife and I certainly won't take our son out of daycare," he said.

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Status sways childcare effects: study

BY EMMA MACDONALD

03 Dec, 2009 08:22 AM

A new study suggests child care can be more harmful for children from high socio-economic backgrounds who miss out on quality time at home with their parents.

But it appears to benefit children from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially when staff ratios are high and groups of children are small.

The study by Australian National University economist Professor Andrew Leigh and social policy researcher Chikako Yamauchi backs up previous Australian and international research showing the effects of non-parental child care differ according to the quality of the care and the social background of the child.

Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children, which follows 10,000 children born in 2004, the study finds some evidence of worse behaviour displayed by children who are not cared for by their own parents when they are aged between two and three.

Yet the study cautions that it would be a mistake to conclude that child care is generally harmful for children.

The correlation between child care and poorer behaviour appears to be linked to a child's background, with children from wealthy, educated parents more likely to behave poorly in child care compared with those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"This accords with prior research, and may reflect the fact that children in these families have more resources at home, or that there are differences in parenting across socio-economic groups," Professor Leigh said.

High socio-economic households contained parents who were more likely to spend more time with their children, more likely to read books, less likely to watch television, less likely to use corporal punishment, and used larger vocabularies to speak with their children.

Conversely, children from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to spend time in front of the television, were less likely to be engaged in conversation with their parents, and less likely to benefit from educational activities and exposure to books. In these cases, child care probably filled important gaps in their development.

The research also found evidence that the negative association between behavioural outcomes and child care use was reduced in child-care centres with smaller group sizes.

In this case, children were exposed to higher levels of adult supervision and interaction.

Professor Leigh will present his research in a keynote address at the Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children conference in Melbourne today.

He cautioned that the research showed only minimal differences in the effect of child care on children and said there was no need for parents to feel guilty about sending their children to day care each day.

"For what it is worth, I won't be pulling my two-year-old out of child care," he said. He believed the huge expansion in formal day care had been beneficial for women and for national productivity.

"It ought to be true that happy parents including parents who want to work are good parents."

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Professor Andrew Leigh at the Acton Early Childhood Centre. Professor Leigh says happy parents are good parents. Photo: MARINA NEIL

The Daily Telegraph

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Childcare kids are more naughty, new study shows

- By Xanthe Kleinig
- From: The Daily Telegraph
- December 03, 2009 12:00AM
- 5 comments

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The Daily Telegraph



One bank guarantee - now we're mad

- From: **The Daily Telegraph**
- December 03, 2009 12:00AM

BANKS are businesses. They exist to earn profits. Everybody knows this and accepts it. After all, almost all of us are chasing a few handy profits ourselves.

But banks, especially since late last year, are different from the rest of us in a very important way. When the Government established a three-year guarantee on savings deposits, it meant banks were largely protected from the worst the global financial crisis could throw at them.

In other words, while other businesses and individuals tried to ride out the GFC as best they could, the major banks had substantially more assistance.

The merits or otherwise of that decision may be debated another time. The point is, now that we're emerging from the GFC terrors, banks don't seem very inclined to extend guarantees to any of their customers.

Westpac, especially, appears to believe that guarantees are a one-way street. They want enhanced financial security while denying exactly the same to mortgagors.

The timing of Westpac's latest rate hike - way above the Reserve Bank rate - is as infuriating as the general principle involved.

Going in to the Christmas shopping season, we'd like some guarantees of our own from all our major banks.

In fact, we'll settle for one: stop bleeding people dry every single chance you get.

Is it curtains?

STAND by for *Political Leadership Spill: The Sequel*. Recent events in Canberra have proved such a hit that state parliament in NSW is now planning a local production, starring Premier Nathan Rees and a supporting cast who wish him to be known by that title no longer.

We've heard before of plans for such a presentation, but they've always fallen through for one reason or another. This time it might be the real thing.

The local production may suffer a little in casting, however. Rees and his tormenters don't have quite the epic scope demonstrated at federal level.

Still, for leadership spill addicts who are suffering withdrawal following Tuesday morning's party room meeting in Canberra, this latest news couldn't come at a better time. It's an absolute blessing.

Although Premier Rees possibly doesn't share that feeling.

Just copy cats

THERE are any number of alleged causes of bad behaviour in children. The latest suggested cause, according to Australian National University academic Andrew Leigh, is other children. Apparently children in childcare learn to throw tantrums simply by observing the wild tantrums thrown by other kids.

But where do those previous children get their tantrum-throwing habits, with all the screaming and yelling and angry faces?

Our guess: they've been watching too much Question Time.

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