

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Is Sensitive Caregiving in Child Care Associated With Children's Effortful Control Skills? An Exploration of Linear and Threshold Effects.

Finch, J. E., Johnson, A. D., & Phillips, D. A. (2015). Is sensitive caregiving in child care associated with children's effortful control skills? An exploration of linear and threshold effects. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 31(2nd Quarter), 125-134. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.12.007

**SUMMARY:** Children's cognitive and socio-emotional development is usually related to the quality of child care they receive. The relationship between sensitive caregiving in child care and preschoolers' effortful control skills were examined in the study. Results revealed that preschools' effortful control was significantly related to the thresholds of caregivers' sensitivity and responsiveness.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Caregiver sensitivity that children experienced at age four was positively associated with their effortful control skills at age five only in settings with high child care quality.
- The positive associations were found for both parent-reported and laboratory-assessed measures of preschoolers' effortful control.
- However, in low or medium quality settings, the relationship between caregiver sensitivity and preschoolers' effortful control skills was not significant.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Receive training on military culture, deployment issues, and unique challenges faced by military children
- Communicate proactively and frequently with military parents about their children's development

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Design professional development curricula for early childhood educators on the importance of sensitivity and responsiveness in interacting with preschoolers
- Offer classes and workshops on how to raise children with high effortful control skills to military parents with small children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Increase awareness about the importance of high quality child care to increase military children's optimal development
- Recommend professional development for early childhood professionals working with military families

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## METHODS

- The sample was part of a larger longitudinal study that aimed to examine the development of temperamentally reactive infants.
- Caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness were assessed when the children were four years old, and children's effortful control skills were measured when they were five years old both by parental report and laboratory assessment.
- The linear and non-linear relationship between caregiver sensitivity and children's effortful control skills were analyzed.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 154 preschoolers who were enrolled in child care; 80 of them were female.
- The average age of the preschoolers was 4.35 years (SD = 0.20 years).
- The majority of the children were White (68%), and most of the mothers received at least a college education (82%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample was over-represented by preschoolers from relatively advantaged homes with college-educated mothers, therefore results of the study may be hard to generalize to preschoolers from less advantaged homes.
- The preschoolers in the study were also oversampled for high-temperamental reactivity as infants, therefore the results may be specific to children with that specific temperament.
- The cross-sectional design of the study does not allow researchers to draw causal conclusions.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit preschoolers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds
- Design randomized controlled experiments to examine the potential causal relationship between caregiver sensitivity and children's effortful control skills
- Expand the scope of the study to examine other important aspects of child care quality that may contribute to children's self-regulatory competencies

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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