

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Do Effects of Early Child Care Extend to Age 15 Years? Results From the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development

Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., Steinberg, L., Vandergrift, N., & NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD study of early child care and youth development. *Child Development*, 81(3), 737-756. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01431.x

**SUMMARY:** Many families place their children in care outside of the home during early childhood. As such, it is important to know the long-term effects of such care. In this study, 958 families were followed over a period of 15 years, giving researchers the opportunity to examine the relationship between childcare during early childhood and youth functioning at age 15. There were significant relationships between type and amount of childcare and outcomes at age 15.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Higher quality care at 4.5 years of age predicted greater cognitive-academic achievement at age 15 years.
- Childcare in early childhood was associated with increased functioning in middle childhood, which in turn predicted increased functioning in adolescence.
- A greater number of hours in childcare during early childhood was associated with more risk-taking and greater impulsivity at age 15 years, though this relationship was mitigated by the experience of high-quality childcare.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Support military families in their selection of high quality child care to maximize positive outcomes given that their child care needs may be different given the demands of their job
- Assist military parents in managing complex, sometimes fluctuating work schedules in an effort to help Service members and their partners balance their military responsibilities with family life

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer activities for children that build skills in managing strong emotions and decreasing impulsivity
- Pair new childcare staff with experienced ones to offer opportunities for mentoring

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend use of a standardized accreditation system for childcare centers that rates care quality
- Encourage limiting the teacher to child ratio in childcare programs

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## METHODS

- Women were recruited from a hospital, completed an interview within a month of their child's birth, and then completed further interviews and testing over the course of the child's life until age 15 years.
- Researchers measured cognitive abilities, risk taking, impulsivity, and externalizing behaviors. Parents reported childcare usage until child's age was 4.5 years. Observational assessments of childcare quality were conducted.
- Data were analyzed to determine associations between childcare before the child was 4.5 years old and outcomes at age 15 years.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 958 youth who had been followed over a period of 15 years (since birth).
- Among the mothers, 26% had no more than a high school education and 21% of families had incomes that were no greater than 200% of the poverty level at the time of the child's birth.
- Of the participants, 76% were White, 13% were Black, and 6% were Latino.

## LIMITATIONS

- All participants were English speaking and did not move in the first three years of the study; this sample may not be representative of all families.
- The study is correlational, which does not allow for conclusions about causation.
- Participants who dropped out of the study differed slightly from those who remained in the study, so the results may be skewed due to those differences.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Focus on children of military families to understand the most important factors in providing quality childcare within that population
- Examine the effects of peer interaction that occurs in early childhood care centers
- Follow children over a longer period of time to examine possible changes in these effects as the child grows into adulthood

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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