

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Childcare and the Development of Behavior Problems Among Economically Disadvantaged Children in Middle Childhood

Votruba-Drzal, E., Coley, R. L., Maldonado-Carreo, C., & Li-Grining, C. P. (2010). Childcare and the development of behavior problems among economically disadvantaged children in middle childhood. *Child Development*, 81(5), 1460-1474. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01485.x

SUMMARY: Interview and observational data were utilized to examine the relationship with a sample of low-income children. The results suggest that high-quality childcare was modestly beneficial in terms of reducing problem behaviors in middle childhood.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Higher quality childcare in preschool was associated with reduced behavior problems in middle childhood.
- High-quality childcare was especially protective against the development of internalizing behaviors in boys and externalizing behaviors among Black children.
- Childcare type (e.g., center- or home-based) nor extent of childcare (e.g., number of hours per week) in preschool were related to reduced problem behaviors in middle childhood.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Participate in professional development trainings to develop skills to improve management of problem behaviors among school-age children
- Develop programming for military parents that includes education on adaptive ways to respond to problem behaviors at home

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate families about characteristics to consider when selecting childcare facilities
- Provide information to childcare personnel about “best practices” in program staff-child interactions and program structure in an effort to maximize the quality of services provided to military children

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support efforts to increase access to and availability of high quality childcare
- Continue to support routine, comprehensive evaluation of the quality of existing childcare programs

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METHODS

- Data were gathered through a longitudinal, multi-method study that included interviews and behavioral observations (both at home and at child care facilities) in three cities (Boston, San Antonio, and Chicago).
- In the home, female caregivers and children were observed and assessed while completing activities together. At child care centers, children were observed for at least two hours and childcare providers were also interviewed.
- Statistical analyses were used to examine the relationship between child care type, quality, and extent and behavior problems during middle childhood.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 345 children from low-income families and their primary female caregiver participated in the study.
- The sample of children were Black (58%), Latino (36%), and White (6%) and approximately half (52%) were male.
- About half of the children's female caregivers had more than a high school education (53%) and were employed (60%).

LIMITATIONS

- Associations between child care and later behavior could be due to other unmeasured variables (e.g., factors associated with living in low-income areas) that were not considered during the analyses.
- There was no information about the range of hours per week that the children were in child care, which limits the ability to know to what extent these findings will apply to children who experience very few or very many hours per week of child care services.
- There are concerns the behavior measure may not be valid for this sample since there is limited research on use of these behavior measures with low income and/or racial minority families.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate a broader range of emotional and behavioral functioning variables among children
- Explore factors that explain why the relationship between childcare quality and behavior is moderated by gender and race
- Gather data on male caregivers' reports of children's behaviors to determine if their reports change the relationship between child care and behavior problems

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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