

No difference in development with childcare

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Parents who have feared sending their babies to childcare too early can rest a little easier, according to a research project led by a Charles Sturt University (CSU) academic.

“In the past, [parents](#) have been worried that early use of childcare may cause behavioural and developmental problems in their children, but we have found that is not the case,” said Associate Professor Linda Harrison from CSU’s School of Teacher Education in Bathurst.

“From one study involving about 1 000 children, we found that entering childcare before a first birthday does not impede development.”

Professor Harrison examined nine measures of social and emotional development in children aged two and three years, comparing the children who started childcare as babies with children who started later, having been at home with a parent in the first year of life.

"We found that starting childcare as babies was not a factor influencing how these children behaved in childcare and at home when they were aged two or three years of age," she said.

"We noted there were other important factors, such as the child's personality or features of the childcare centre they were currently attending, that made a difference to these outcomes, but there was no difference based on what kind of care they had received as babies."

The study used various measures to determine how the children were

faring, including how they interacted with others, the level of problem behaviors, and how much they appeared to enjoy their activities in childcare.

Associate Professor Harrison says the findings were based on reports by teachers and by parents.

"Parents struggle when making decisions about the kind of child care to use when they are deciding on a care arrangement for their very young children. It's up to the parents to make decisions about when they need child care," she said.

"As we are moving into the new federal policies regarding parental leave, infants will be starting childcare at a later age than we might have had in the past.

"And I think that's a good thing, so that [babies](#) develop the kind of supportive relationships they need with their parents to be able to move out into the world and form new relationships with new caregivers and other children."

Professor Harrison says the research has implications for the qualifications needed for the national childcare sector.

"I think professional education is absolutely critical for ensuring that high quality education programs are provided in childcare centres," Professor Harrison said.

"Caregivers and educators in [childcare](#) centres should have good qualifications, as staff qualifications are a key feature of a high-quality program. We know from decades of research that high-quality programs result in better outcomes for children, not just cognitively but in social and emotional areas as well."

The research, drawn from data in the Longitudinal Study of Australian [Children](#) which was funded by the federal government, was presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies conference in Melbourne on Thursday 26 July.

More information: www.csu.edu.au/faculty/educat/teached

Provided by Charles Sturt University

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