

Time spent in childcare centres linked with poor behaviour

October 31 2014, by David Ellis

A major national study has found that the length of time a child spends at a childcare centre in the first three years of life is associated with a particular set of problem behaviours by ages 4-5 years.

The study, conducted by researchers in the University of Adelaide's School of Population Health, found that children who spend longer in centre-based [childcare](#) are more likely to be hyperactive, disruptive and aggressive at [school age](#).

However, the study also found that these children were less likely to be withdrawn, anxious or depressed.

The research was based on data of more than 3200 children from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and involved surveys of parents and teachers. The project looked at children's development following time spent at different types of childcare.

"By the age of three, 75% of children in this study had spent regular time in the care of someone other than the parent," says PhD student Angela Gialamas, from the University's Better Start Child Health and Development Research Group.

"One of our key findings was that time spent at a formal childcare centre was directly associated with small but noticeable increases in what we call 'externalising' problem behaviours, compared to children who did not attend any type of childcare in the first three years of life. This

includes hyperactivity - being restless, easily distracted, constantly fidgeting - and disruptive and aggressive behaviours, such as losing their temper and fighting with other children.

"These problems were not directly linked with other forms of childcare, such as family day care and care by nannies and grandparents," she says.

Ms Gialamas says the same group of children was less likely to show 'internalising' problem [behaviours](#) than children who didn't attend childcare. "Our study showed that children in centre-based care were less likely to be unhappy and clingy in new situations, according to parent and teacher reports," she says. "So there are both positive and negative effects seen among this group of children."

Ms Gialamas says this research adds to the growing understanding of how childcare affects the behaviour and development of Australian children. "Much of the childcare research is coming from the US or the UK, but it's important to see what is happening in the Australian context. We need to better understand how childcare is contributing to [children's](#) learning, development and transition to school."

The results of this research have been published in the journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

More information: "Time spent in different types of childcare and children's development at school entry: an Australian longitudinal study." *Arch Dis Child* [DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2014-306626](https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2014-306626)

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