

# Working parents' mental health improves when young children are in nursery school

August 22 2019, by Tony Trueman

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Working parents have better mental health when their young children are

looked after part-time in nursery schools or other formal childcare, rather than just by relatives, research says.

Research on 6,700 [parents](#) of one- and two-year-olds in 29 European countries, including the UK, found that parents using part-time formal [childcare](#) had better mental [health](#) than those who used informal childcare only.

Nikolett Somogyi and Professor Sarah Van de Velde, of the University of Antwerp, and Professor Wim Van Lancker, of the Catholic University of Leuven, analysed data from the 2013 European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey.

They told the European Sociological Association conference in Manchester, England, today [Thursday 22nd August] that of the combinations of full or part-time childcare in formal or informal settings, only those using part-time formal childcare reported fewer mental health problems.

When compared with those using full-time formal childcare, they rated their mental health as between 2.7% and 3.8% higher.

"The share of dual-earner couples is continuously increasing in Europe, therefore more and more young children are looked after by non-parental caregivers during parents' working hours," Ms Somogyi told the conference.

"Parents may prefer formal childcare because it is thought to be beneficial for children's cognitive and socio-[emotional development](#), since this type of care is performed by professional caretakers.

"In addition, it could be perceived as more trustworthy because the staff are more accountable compared to a private babysitter or family

childcare. Parents may see it as more reliable and it also enables mothers and fathers to avoid feeling being indebted towards kin.

"Informal care, in contrast, is often considered to be less reliable, since family members cannot be obliged to provide care under all circumstances, and it is thought to be less beneficial for the cognitive development of children, with children being less socialized into cooperating with peers."

The researchers found that those using part-time formal childcare and part-time informal childcare together also had better mental health, and this was because of the formal care. Those who used full-time childcare of any kind reported worse mental health than [part-time](#) care users.

The researchers adjusted the statistics in order to control for factors such for gender, age, household income, employment arrangements and educational level. This allowed them to study the link between childcare and [mental health](#) in isolation.

They found that the effect applied across all of the 29 European countries studied.

Provided by European Sociological Association

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