

# Proportion of Kindergarten Classmates with Day Care Experience Matters, Study Shows

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The debate over the effects of putting young children into child care outside the home has been brewing for years. Previous studies on the impact of child care report mixed findings. Children who are taken care of by nonfamily members at an earlier age, and remain in their care longer, are more aggressive and disobedient when they reach kindergarten. However, children who receive quality child care also are better prepared for formal schooling and have better language and thinking skills than their peers when they reach school age.

What happens when children with different early childhood experiences finally reach school age and are grouped together in their first kindergarten classes? Do the emotional and academic differences between those with lots of child care in their history and those without it persist? Or do the children become more like each other? Until now, there has been very little scientific evidence concerning the effects of mixing children with extensive daycare experiences with those with little or no daycare exposure.

Julia Dmitrieva and Laurence Steinberg of Temple University and Jay Belsky of London's Birkbeck University decided to explore this question scientifically. They studied over 3400 kindergarteners in almost 300 classrooms, over a year, keeping track of how much they argued and fought with other children, as well as their displays of anger and impulsivity. They also measured their academic competence, in reading and math and so forth.

When the psychologists looked closely at the children whose kindergarten classmates had logged many hours in child care, the findings were clear. As reported in the December issue of the journal *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, by the end of the kindergarten year both groups, those with lots of child care experience and those with little or none, were influenced by their peers' daycare histories, for better *and* worse. That is, in classes with a high proportion of students with extensive early child care experience, children were more likely to misbehave in the classroom and perform better on tests of achievement, regardless of their own personal child care experiences.

While nearly two of every three American children today get some of their care giving from nonfamily members, usually beginning before their first birthday. That means that thousands of classrooms all over the country, and all the children schooled in them, are affected by child care, no matter what choice a parent makes for his or her own child.