

DID UBC PROFESSORS MISREPRESENT PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH FINDING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURAL IMPACT OF CHILD CARE IN DAYCARE CENTRES?

Dr Hillel Goelman of UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) was on the BC Provincial Child Care Council. This is his response to the January 3, 2008 Daily Mail article featuring findings from the massive NICHD (US) Child Care Effect Study in an interview with lead researcher, Dr. Jay Belsky.

NOTES:

"Paul" = Dr. Paul Kershaw, also from UBC's HELP and serving on the Provincial Child Care Council.

"Clyde" = Dr. Clyde Hertzman, head of UBC's HELP and serving on the Provincial Child Care Council.

"Child care" is defined in the NICHD study as non-maternal care over 10 hours/week. The NICHD defined "high quality" based on child-adult interactions. High quality "child care" was more often done by fathers and grandparents. "Centre care" was found to predict lasting negative behavioural effects including aggression, cruelty and non-compliance.

EMAIL RESPONSE BY DR HILLEL GOELMAN JANUARY 9, 2008 TO BC PROVINCIAL CHILD CARE COUNCIL

"Belsky is mis-stating the NICHD data and the popular press in the UK is exaggerating findings in much the same way that the US popular media did before he moved to the UK. The negative 'finding' that is at the core of Belsky's argument is that some toddlers in care for more than 30 hours/week in poor quality care may be at risk for 'slightly elevated' levels of negative social interactions with other kids and less compliance with adults. It is NOT a blanket finding on all kids of all ages in all kinds of care. The other NICHD scholars have pointed out that this 'finding' is not statistically significant (meaning that it is not generalizable) and is far below clinical levels of aggressive behaviour. (Interestingly, among the nonmaternal types of care where this 'finding' was reported was care by the child's father. Do we want policies that discourage fathers from being their children's primary caregivers?)

The key point, as Paul rightly points out, is that quality care is a key issue but quality is buried at the end of article where Belsky mentions its importance.

The Belsky 'finding' also has to be considered in the context of the broader NICHD findings as well as in many other results from longitudinal studies which point to the positive impacts of good quality care on kids' cognitive, language, social, emotional and motor development. I can point the Council to a number of excellent reviews of the child care literature (Deborah Vandell; Michael Lamb) that synthesize the results of many different studies.

As Clyde points out, Belsky left North America for a number of reasons which aren't really going into at length. What the article really shows is the danger of taking complex and nuanced data and grossly oversimplifying (if not distorting) the findings. If we are going to consider research

findings in our discussions (a great idea) we must do it with balanced and accurate information, not selective and distorted summaries of the original research."