

## DID UBC PROFESSORS MIS-REPRESENT PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH FINDING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR IMPACTS OF DAYCARE CENTRES?

January 9, 2008 email response by UBC Human Early Learning Partnership Professor (HELP)  
Dr. Paul Kershaw to BC Provincial Child Care Council.

He responds to January 3, 2008 article in UK Daily Mail interview with lead researcher Dr. Jay  
Belsky on negative findings for daycare centre care in the US NICHD Child Care Effect Study.

KERSHAW COMMENTS IN CAPITALS - article quotes in lower case.

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Parents should get tax breaks to help them bring up their children at home, says Gordon Brown's  
childcare research chief.

**TAX BREAKS WILL GENERALLY BE WEAK AT ENCOURAGING FATHERS TO TAKE  
MORE TIME OUTSIDE OF EMPLOYMENT TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. SO THIS  
PARTICULAR POLICY PROPOSAL WILL REINFORCE THE GENDER DIVISION OF  
CARE,** WHICH HAS A HOST OF LONG-TERM PROBLEMS THAT MATERIALIZE FOR  
WOMEN OVER THEIR LIFE COURSES. PLUS, MEN MISS OUT ON THE PLEASURE  
AND SATISFACTION OF SHARING CHILD REARING TIME.

KEEP IN MIND THAT WELL-STRUCTURED LEAVE POLICIES HAVE PROVEN MORE  
SUCCESSFUL AT INVOLVING MEN DIRECTLY IN CHILD-REARING IN THE EARLY  
MONTHS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES, WHICH HAS BEEN SHOWN TO HAVE  
LONGER-TERM, POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT OVER THE  
LIFE COURSE OF THE CHILD/FAMILY.

THE UK HAS RELATIVELY WEAK PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY BY INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARDS.

Professor Jay Belsky warned that toddlers who spend long hours in nurseries or with  
childminders suffer "disconcerting" effects.

HIS CREDENTIALS ARE IMPRESSIVE, AND HIS VIEWS NEED TO BE TAKEN  
SERIOUSLY. DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCH SCHOLARS LIKE HILLEL ARE BETTER  
POSITIONED TO ADD MORE INFORMATION.

These include difficult relationships with their mothers and aggressive and disobedient behaviour  
when they start school. Those who spend time in centre-based care from a very young age are  
particularly at risk, he said.

THERE IS SOME MENTION OF THE QUALITY OF THE CENTRE-BASED PROGRAMS  
NOT BEING THE ISSUE TOWARD THE BOTTOM OF THE ARTICLE. THIS IS ONE  
CLAIM I WOULD WANT TO INTERROGATE MORE CLOSELY, SINCE RESEARCH  
CONSISTENTLY SHOWS THAT QUALITY IS KEY, REGARDLESS OF THE CARE  
SETTING, PARENTAL OR OTHERWISE.

Professor Belsky, the man brought in to assess the Government's Sure Start family centres scheme, made his plea for change "on humanitarian grounds".

He said that tax policies should reduce - rather than increase - the pressure on parents to leave their youngsters in the care of others.

AS ABOVE, PROVIDING PARENTS WITH MORE TIME TO CARE PERSONALLY IS A LAUDABLE GOAL, PARTICULARLY IN COUNTRIES LIKE THE UK, CANADA AND THE US WHICH HAVE REALLY LONG EMPLOYMENT HOUR NORMS (ESPECIALLY FOR MEN), AND RELATIVELY FEW ANNUAL HOLIDAYS. BUT TAXES AREN'T THE ONLY POLICY MECHANISM TO DO THIS: EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AND LEAVE POLICIES WILL BE MORE TARGET EFFECTIVE. AND TAXES SUFFER THE RISK OF REINFORCING EXISTING SYSTEMS THAT ALREADY CAPITALIZE ON WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE LABOUR, TO THE BENEFIT OF MEN IN PUBLIC SPACES LIKE BUSINESS AND POLITICS.

The findings will come as a deep embarrassment to Labour, which has pumped £21 billion into subsidising childcare and toddler education over the past decade.

It has been heavily criticised for pressing mothers back into the workforce by giving out large sums through the tax credit system for them to spend on nurseries.

INDEED IT WILL BE EMBARRASSING. I IMAGINE THAT ATTENTION WILL TURN QUICKLY TO QUESTIONS ABOUT QUALITY IN THE CENTRES, AS PER BELSKY'S OWN COMMENTS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE ARTICLE.

Ministers have insisted that the only way for two-parent families to ensure they stay out of poverty is for both parents to work.

ALMOST ALL OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE EVIDENCE OF WHICH I'M AWARE CONFIRMS THAT THE MINISTERS ARE ABSOLUTELY CORRECT. THE RISK OF POVERTY IS MUCH, MUCH HIGHER FOR ONE-EARNER COUPLES IN CANADA AND ELSEWHERE. THERE IS NO DENYING THAT WE LIVE IN A DIFFERENT ECONOMIC CONTEXT THAN 40 YEARS AGO.

PLUS, GENDER EQUALITY RESTS WITH WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN THE PAID LABOUR MARKET. BUT, JUST AS IMPORTANT, GENDER EQUALITY RESTS WITH MEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN CAREGIVING. SO THERE IS ROOM TO CREATE MORE PARENTAL TIME FOR FATHERS INDEED. NOTICE THAT QUEBEC IS ALREADY IN THE BUSINESS OF DOING THIS. THAT PROVINCE HAS INCREASED THE VALUE OF ITS PARENTAL LEAVE, MAKING IT MORE AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES, INCLUDING THE HIGHER INCOME EARNERS IN FAMILIES, TO TAKE THE TIME OFF. GIVEN THE GENDER EARNINGS GAP, MEN ARE MORE OFTEN THE HIGHER EARNERS, SO IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY ARE LESS LIKELY TO TAKE LEAVE FOR THE POLICY-RELATED REASON THAT THE HOUSEHOLD LOSES LESS WHEN THE HIGHER EARNER DOESN'T TAKE THE CUT IN PAY THAT COMES WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM. IN ADDITION, QUEBEC RESERVES SOME LEAVE TIME EXCLUSIVELY FOR FATHERS. IF THE FATHERS DON'T USE IT, THE FAMILY LOSES IT. I HAVE SHOWN ELSEWHERE THAT THIS POLICY STRATEGY IS PROVING MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN OTHERS WHEN IT COMES TO CHALLENGING THE GENDER DIVISION OF CARE IN THE MONTHS/YEARS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE

BIRTH OF A CHILD; AND THUS PROVIDING FATHERS WITH MORE TIME TO CARE PERSONALLY, WHICH IS IN KEEPING WITH BELSKY'S RECOMMENDATION.

Around £10 billion of the spending has gone into Mr Brown's favoured Sure Start scheme, where family centres, increasingly concentrate on providing childcare.

Professor Belsky and his team on the £20 million evaluation project have published no major reports in two years - not since they showed that Sure Start was doing more harm than good for the worstoff children. He has made no public comments in Britain during this time. These latest remarks were made to a seminar held in Germany in July. HMMM. WHY NO REPORTS IN THE PEER-REVIEWED LITERATURE? MAYBE HILLEL OR CLYDE CAN SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS ISSUE. I HAVEN'T SEEN A PRESENTATION ABOUT SURE START FOR 18 MONTHS.

Brown has been criticised for giving benefits to working single mothers

BUT BROWN HAS BEEN LAUDED EQUALLY FOR GIVING BENEFITS TO WORKING SINGLE MOTHERS. INDEED, IT IS COUNTRIES THAT HAVE THE HIGHEST WELFARE RATES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS, WHICH ALSO HAVE THE HIGHEST RATES OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS INTERNATIONALLY - CONTRARY TO OUR CONCERN ABOUT A WELFARE WALL IN BC AND THE REST OF CANADA. AND IT IS THE PLACES THAT HAVE THE HIGHEST EMPLOYMENT RATES FOR LONE MOTHERS THAT HAVE ALSO REDUCED CHILD POVERTY TO ABOUT 3 PERCENT - ALMOST NOTHING. BY CONTRAST, THE POVERTY RATE FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN BC IS OVER 20 PERCENT, AND WE HAVE LOWER EMPLOYMENT RATES FOR LONE MOTHERS THAN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES.

Professor Belsky, the director of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at Birkbeck College in London, said that both US and British research points in the same direction.

"The risks are that more hours in any kind of childcare across the first four-and-a-half years of life and, independently, the more time in childcare centres, the higher the levels of problem behaviour," he added.

There is also evidence "that children who spend more time in non-maternal care through their infancy, toddler and pre-school years experience somewhat less harmonious mother-child relationships through their first three years".

He said they "start school being somewhat more aggressive and disobedient than children with less non-maternal care experience".

These "disconcerting" effects can not be blamed on poor-quality childcare - and "seem more likely and longlasting when children experience centrebased care early in life".

HILLEL, GIVEN YOUR FAMILIARITY WITH NICHD, HOW DO YOU THINK THIS QUOTE REPRESENTS THE US DATA?

Professor Belsky said that although family background has a bigger influence on development, "more and more children seem to be spending more and more time and younger and younger ages in nonmaternal care arrangements in the English-speaking world".

He added: "This means that small effects, when experienced by many children, may have broad-scale consequences."

He called for policies to help reduce time spent in childcare, in particular "centre-based care" - and to give a parent the opportunity to stay at home if they so wish.

IF THE GOAL IS LESS TIME IN CHILD CARE CENTRES, WHICH REMAINS OPEN TO DEBATE IN CANADA WHERE THIS CARE ARRANGEMENT IS NOT THE MOST COMMON, THEN ONE PERSON STAYING AT-HOME IS FAR FROM THE 'ONLY' OPTION. HAVING BOTH PARENTS WORK  $\frac{3}{4}$  TIME IS A FAR MORE ECONOMICALLY STRATEGIC VISION OF THE FAMILY FOR GOVERNMENTS TO PROMOTE, SINCE BOTH PARENTS WILL THEN CULTIVATE LABOUR MARKET ATTACHMENTS. THUS, WHEN ONE PERSON'S EMPLOYMENT TIES WEAKEN AS A RESULT OF LAYOFFS, SLOW-DOWN, ETC, THE OTHER IS MORE LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO KEEP A FAMILY ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE.

PLUS, HAVING BOTH MOTHERS AND FATHERS EARN AND CARE SIMULTANEOUSLY IS THE ONLY DIVISION OF LABOUR THAT WILL PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN A WAY THAT VALUES CAREGIVING AND SUCCESS IN PUBLIC SPACES.

FINALLY, BELSKY'S RECOMMENDATION THAT MORE PEOPLE STAY AT HOME IS BLOWING AGAINST THE ECONOMIC WIND. **DECLINING REAL MALE WAGES HAVE MORE TO DO WITH INCREASED FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION OVER THE LAST FOUR DECADES THAN DID FEMINISM.** AND IT IS WOMEN'S WORK SUSTAINING HOUSEHOLD INCOMES THAT HAS KEPT DEMAND FOR GOODS AND SERVICES UP, WHICH IS NECESSARY FOR **ECONOMIC GROWTH...**

AND CANADA'S NATIONAL COUNCIL ON WELFARE HAS SHOWN YEAR AFTER YEAR THAT IF WE HAD MOTHERS RETREAT FROM THE LABOUR MARKET BACK HOME FULL-TIME, THEN POVERTY RATES IN THE COUNTRY WOULD SKYROCKET.

"Tax policies should support families rearing infants and young children in ways that afford parents the freedom to make child-rearing arrangements that they deem best for their child," he added.

The system should "reduce the economic coercion that necessitates many, at least in the U.S.A and the UK, to leave the care of their children to others when they would rather not".

BUT FATHERS HAVE HISTORICALLY SEEMED KEEN TO LEAVE CARE FOR THEIR KIDS TO OTHERS....

The professor said the effects are less in "high-quality childcare", which should be encouraged.

SO THE DETAILS OF THE FINDINGS REALLY MATTER TO INTERPRET THIS CAVEAT....

His definition of quality is thought to be based on well-trained staff and good child-staff ratios.

"All of these conclusions could be justified on humanitarian grounds alone," he said.

Mr Brown has attracted criticism both for Labour's insistence that all mothers should work and for giving benefits to working single mothers.

A final report on Sure Start was due to be published in 2006, but nothing appeared.

The most recent major piece of analysis came out in December 2005.

In it, Professor Belsky and his colleagues said that middle-class families had taken advantage of the Sure Start facilities and the poorest were shut out.

YES, AND I WOULD BET WE ARE SEEING EXACTLY THE SAME THING WHEN IT COMES TO OUR STRONG START IN BC...

However, Mr Brown endorsed the network by pumping in an extra £4billion during the summer.

Professor Belsky's team is understood to have submitted a new report to be published over the next three months.

The American-born academic, 56, said of his comments in Germany: "Tax policy should enable parents to make choices. When they choose childcare, it should be good quality childcare."

THERE IS NO DISPUTING THE LAST POINT.