

Effect of Childcare on the Family Unit

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Introductions

Society changes in correlation with educational, cultural, economical and political changes. As education levels increase in one's environment, so does salary and living conditions. As cultures evolve over time, the norms of society change as well. A traditional family before was made up of mother, father and children with grandparents or aunts and uncles in close proximity. Now a 'traditional' family may consist of single parents, children or step children, less extended family. With economic pressures on single parent families, it is vital for both men and women to be working. Women have joined with work place not only to add to income but also to ensure their own safety in an environment where divorce rate is increasing. As pressures from all avenues increase in our society, individuals have had to rely on themselves, spending more time at work, working in extremely competitive environments to maintain job security, and to stay ahead of their competition. With adults engaged in such high pressure lifestyles, there children are affected as well. Children are spending more time at daycares and after school programs, they have more meals outside the home than at home with the family, and children are split between divorced parents and some living with grandparents.

Children attending schools and daycare for the major part of their day and life are getting most of their emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual support from teachers and classmates. This paper will attempt to learn more about what the impact of childcare is having on the family, what the pros and cons are of childcare, how it affects the family unit, and what it means for early educators.

Society today has recognized the changes taking place around us, with maternal time off and family leave laws it is evident that we recognize the increase of mothers in the working environment. As a result, we see an increase in schools and childcare to meet the needs of these parents. Ensuring the safety, health, and learning of children is the responsibility of parents and society. Children are cared for in various ways, from parents, teachers, extended family and friends. The childcare 'industry' is at a shifting interface between the economy and the family (Kirstine Hansen, Heather Joshi and Georgia Verropoulou). As children spend more time in childcare centers with the major part of their day with educators like teachers, the impact of such lifestyles has to be understood too. A study done by Kristine, et al, looked at the childcare in Britain; trends of childcare use, and looked at the outcome of children in childcare over a period of four decades. With the increase of women in the workplace, the family is faced with challenges of raising children. As a result more and more families depend on childcare, nannies and grandparents. Originally, mothers were considered 'Good Mothers' when they put the needs of their children before their own. Spending time with children and attending to their needs was the primary responsibility of good mothers. As babies are born, the importance of initial bonding in the early years was and is considered vital to the healthy learning and growing of the child. Working mothers deprive the child of time needed to build a bond between mother and child; time away from the child decreases the nurturing and teaching a mother should do with her child. Overall, depriving the child of its mother leads to poor bonding, delayed cognitive and emotional development in the child (Kristine, et al 2006).

However, as we evolve over time and recognize the need for external care for children, views and theories have evolved too. Research shows that the effects of children having long hours of non maternal care varies according to individual circumstances. While negative effects in educational attainment have been observed in children ages 0-5 of working mothers other studies have shown beneficial outcomes of children in daycares. Children who entered daycare under 18 months show less adverse effect on development than those that received informal care such as grandparents and nannies. Research shows that younger children are more commonly taken to informal care such as grandma or nanny, and older children are more commonly taken to daycares. It was in families who relied on informal care, particularly grandmothers, nannies where the adverse outcomes were observed. Childcare in a formal setting such as a childcare center has proven to provide benefits to children verses informal care. In a research of 3 yr old children followed to age 7, it was evident that the impact of good quality pre-school improved cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Having children in quality childcare also resulted in having mothers and fathers increasing family income which correlates positively for children. Also, despite mothers spending more time at work, the amount of quality time and attention given to their children has remained constant. Plus, knowing the pressures of the work place, parents are providing stimulating environments for children to better teach and prepare them for the future (Kirstine Hansen, Heather Joshi and Georgia Verropoulou, 2006)

In considering the quality of childcare, the choice of care is influenced by the family's budget, availability, and family values. With over 70% of children under the age of six are attending some kind of external care, the impact of such experiences impacts

the learning and development of children. Research shows that families depend on care from relatives, daycare centers, family day cares, babysitters and nannies. Since the impact of early education is known to be vital in the development of children, it is crucial to know what the most positive aspects of early education are that have a positive impact on a child. Studies show that a positive environment has a lasting positive effect like greater school success, higher graduation rates, lower juvenile crime and lower teenager pregnancy rates. Children have better math and language skills, better social, cognitive, interpersonal and behavioral skills. But child care comes with a cost, a high cost that many cannot afford, which makes stay home moms or grandparents babysitters. But in home care does not mean the child gets the positive rich environment for his emotional, social and cognitive well being. Most in home care adults have little knowledge of early education and children at home are lonely because interactions are minimal with other children and adults (Pediatrics, 2005).

Analyzing the impact of in home care, a study conducted by Bowers & Myers (1999) looked at the impact of grandmothers caring for grandchildren. A survey of 101 grandmothers providing care for grandchildren 14 yrs and younger was conducted. The findings from the study show that the primary reason for taking care of children was due to drug and alcohol abuse by the parents of the children. The survey also showed that relationship between grandparents and parents of the children had grown negatively since caring for their kids where as the relationship between the grandparents and child had grown positively. The Grandmothers also reported worse relationship with their own spouses since care had began, mainly due to time constraints. The grandmothers felt burdened, less energetic, and more stressed if behavior problems existed with the child.

The study also showed that grandchildren in full time care of grandparents showed more behavioral problems than children not in full time care. Part-time care by grandparents was shown to provide higher satisfaction, less stress and better child behavior (Bowers & Myers 1999).

Early education has a lasting impression on children in the long run, but there are external factors that do not provide an option to parents about where to send their children. Most single parents, who are not only the sole provider but the sole care taker as well, have fewer options regarding childcare. In such situations, households with one parent are faced with time constraints, income constraints and emotional and physical constraints. A study by Lyn (2005) conducted a survey of over seven thousand individuals measuring child interactions, physical and social development and passive care (i.e. supervision of activity) and secondary activity (measuring multitasking while taking care of children) among single mothers, married mothers and fathers. Findings from the study show that married working mothers allocate less time to paid work, whereas married women spend more time at work. This means that having children decreases the time married mothers spend at work with this being more prominent the younger their child. However, single mothers were found to participate less in paid work (60%) compared to 48% of married mothers of children the same age. Even when measuring part-time work, married mothers are more likely to work part-time than single mothers. On the other hand, women whether single moms or married, did the same amount of housework net of childcare. In terms of childcare, single and married mothers spent the same amount of time in childcare, married fathers spent about 50 minutes a day in childcare making the net more for married parents in terms of time spent in childcare.

The findings from this study show that single mothers spend less time at work, less time on housework and more in supervised childcare (multitasking), single mothers manage to almost match couple families level of childcare. The demands on married mothers is greater, working more hours, spending more time in house work, taking care of children and their husbands (Lyn 2005).

As we look upon the demands of society on parents and their children, we must also remember the cultural aspect of raising a family. "The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place nor fulfill its essential functions" (McKay, Preface). Within the family, people experience most of life's greatest joys and greatest sorrows. The family relationships of every person on earth are of cardinal importance, and of all the social organizations created for human beings, only the family is intended to continue into the next life.

Conclusions

The changes in the work environment have taken more and more women into the workplace increasing the need for childcare. More children are in daycares, more time is spent in external care facilities than at home. This paper looks at the impact of such changes taking place in our society. Children getting informal care such as grandparents and nannies were seen to have negative impact on learning and development than those in structured childcare facilities. Grandmothers caring for their grandchildren experienced more negative outcomes and children showed more behavioral challenges. Contrary to previous belief, time given by single mothers to that of married mothers to childcare was equal; reflecting the increase in childcare in today's society is not a factor of single or both parents but rather of working and non-working parents. There are pros to having

children in centers that are structured with a rich setting to stimulate learning such as increased math and language, advance social, emotional and cognitive skills. However, the usefulness of parent care must be balanced with external care to provide children with different stimulating environments. Parents provide the basis of bonding and trust that can grow with external stimulation. Children need parents and the community in which to learn and grow. Having childcare must not be a substitute for parental care because children start with a foundation that parents provide and schools grow.

The responsibility of children is upon all of us. Whether stressed with external factors, parents first responsibility is to their own children. As we juggle work and kids, we must remember that our lack of attention to our children today will be harder to correct once this moment has past.

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