



## Day Care

This Factsheet summarises research into the effect of day care on a child's cognitive and social development. Some research studies demonstrate that day care has a positive effect on a child's development; others suggest that day care has a less favourable outcome. A plausible explanation for these contradictory findings relates to the quality and consistency of care. Other factors, such as individual differences in personality, can also impact on a child's day care experience.



### What is day care?

It is where the child is temporarily cared for by someone who is not a family member and is not well-known to the child. Care of the child frequently takes place outside the home (e.g., in nurseries, within the workplace, schools, or churches). Alternatively, the child may be cared for by a child minder, either within the child's home or the child minders' home.

### Research into day care

Research has focused on the effects of day care on the child's cognitive and social development.

#### What is cognitive development?

"The cognitive (mental) changes that take place as a person grows older" (Flanagan, 2000).



#### What is social development?

"The development of sociability where the child learns how to relate to others and process of socialization in which child acquires knowledge and skills appropriate to his/her society" (Flanagan, 2003).



Research into this area has found no clear answers; research supporting day care has found it to be related to positive outcomes for the child, while research against day care suggests that the disruption of continuous care is harmful for the child.

Table 1: Key studies into the effects of day care on cognitive development

Researcher & year	Aim	Participants	Procedure	Findings	Evaluation	Positive/negative effect of day care on development?
Andersson (1992)	To examine the long-term effects of day care.	100 children from lower- & middle-class homes, and one-parent families.	The families were first contacted when children were between 3- & 4-years-old. Early childcare arrangements were recorded. Socio-emotional competence and IQ were reassessed at age 8 & 13.	School performance was highest in children who entered day care before age one. School performance lowest in those with no day care.	Those who entered day care at age one had higher socioeconomic status, this could be why the children did better. This study was conducted in Sweden which operates a special parental leave system and gives day care a lot of financial support. Thus results could be due to stronger attachment bonds and high quality care not available in all countries.	Suggests high quality care has positive outcomes.
Operation Headstart (1960s)	To provide children from low-income families with a rich stimulating environment to improve their cognitive development	Children from deprived backgrounds entered the program aged 3-4 years old.	The program involved exposing children to stimulation they would lack in their family lives, such as a wide vocabulary.	After a year in Headstart, children typically gained ten IQ points, were less likely to be placed in special classes and were more likely to obtain a high school certificate. The children were also less likely to be unemployed as adults.	Unless the program was followed with other special programs throughout the child's education then the initial gains largely disappeared.	This program proved to have positive effects. Even though initial gains in IQ may disappear later on, the children still benefited from a better standard of life later on.

**Table 2: Key studies into the effects of day care on social development**

Researcher & year	Aim	Participants	Procedure	Findings	Evaluation	Positive/negative effect of day care on development?
<b>NICHD report (1997)</b>	To examine the effects of day care on attachments	1000 infants and their mothers	Mothers were interviewed and the children were observed at home and in day care on two occasions: when the infants were 6 months old and when they were 15 months.	Infants with extensive day care experiences did not exhibit any more stress than those without extensive day care experiences when separated from caregiver during the strange situation.	When other factors were combined with day care experiences, such as maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, then poor quality care or experiencing more than minimal amounts of day care had negative effects on children.	Suggests no effect of day care on development unless combined with other factors which have a negative impact.
<b>Vandell &amp; Corasaniti (1990)</b>	Examined the effects of child-care experiences on cognitive development	Children with extensive child care experiences from infancy.	Parents and teachers rated the children's peer relationships and emotional health.	The children with extensive child-care experiences had poor peer relationships and poor emotional health.	Findings are in opposition to those by Andersson.  This study was conducted in Texas which has very low requirements for day care facilities.	Negative.

### Why the contradictory research findings?

The quality and the consistency of care that the children receive while in day care may explain these contradictory research findings. Both quality and consistency can affect a child's cognitive, emotional and social development. Each of the factors outlined below affects at least one of these areas of development.

#### (i) Factors relating to HIGH quality care and GOOD consistency of care

- ◆ **Quality of care:**
  - Emotional involvement of caregivers to provide substitute emotional care
  - Good verbal interaction between caregiver and child
  - Stimulating environment (e.g., colourful, with plenty of toys).
- ◆ **Consistency of care:**
  - Low staff turnover
  - Appropriate staff-child ratio so that each caregiver cares for only a few children.
  - Established routine so that each child knows what will happen and when.



#### (ii) Factors relating to LOW quality care and POOR consistency of care

- ◆ **Quality of care:**
  - Lack of emotional involvement of caregiver.
  - Poor verbal interaction between caregiver and child may result from inappropriate staff-child ratio.
  - Un-stimulating environment
- ◆ **Consistency of care:**
  - High staff turnover
  - Inappropriate staff-child ratio where one caregiver has a number of children to care for so individual attention is reduced.
  - Lack of routine

It is important to remember that other factors, which are unrelated to the quality and consistency of day care, can also affect a child's day care experience. Consider the following factors:

- ◆ **Age & time in day care:** the age at which a child enters day care, how many hours a day, days a week, months or years, that they attend day care for can all impact on the child's day care experience.
- ◆ **Social background:** parents from low-income families may only be able to afford the cheapest day care that may result in low quality care.
- ◆ **Family relationships:** if the relationship between the child's parents is strained this may result in the child having a negative experience of day care.
- ◆ **Individual differences:** shy, unsociable children may find day care threatening (securely attached children may have a more positive day care experience).

### Improving day care

#### To improve quality of care:

- ◆ Increase verbal interaction between caregiver and child
- ◆ Provide highly stimulating environment (e.g., with colourful wall displays and toys).
- ◆ Provide sensitive emotional care
- ◆ Provide caregiver training

#### To improve consistency of care:

- ◆ Limit the number of caregivers per child (low staff-child ratio)
- ◆ Limit staff turnover
- ◆ Establish routine

### Example Exam Questions

(a) Describe ONE research study that has investigated the effects of day care on children's social OR cognitive development

(6 marks)

Do exactly as the question asks; choose just one research study for either research into social or cognitive development (e.g., cognitive development: Andersson (1992) or Vandell et al. (1990); social development: Schweinhart et al. (1993) or NICHD report (2001)). Do not waste time doing both as you will not receive any credit for doing so.

(b) Give two criticisms of this study

(3 marks)

This is where it is worth reading through all the questions first at the start of the exam, then you can ensure that you pick a study that you know two criticisms for!

(c) Describe TWO research studies that have investigated the effects of day care on children's social and/or cognitive development

(6 + 6 marks)

Notice the mark allocation – there will be six marks for each research study so allow equal time for each. Here you have a choice of whether to do just studies into social development or just studies into cognitive development or one of each. Think carefully about which studies you know most about before starting to answer the question.

(d) "Whilst going out to work may be beneficial to mothers of young children, the children themselves will suffer compared with those whose mothers do not work."

To what extent does psychological research support this view of the effects of day care on children's social and/or cognitive development?

(18 marks)

Remember there are six marks allocated for AO1 points and 12 marks allocated for AO2 points, so spend six minutes describing and 12 minutes evaluating ('mark per minute rule' see below). Again, here you can choose whether to include one or both of research into cognitive and social development. If you choose to include research into just one of these areas, you must ensure that you are able to cover it in sufficient detail. If you choose to cover research into both areas, then you can do so a little more superficially.

**Exam Hint** Remember the 'mark per minute' rule, roughly you should allow the same number of minutes to answer a question as the number of marks the question is worth. For instance, spend 18 minutes answering an 18 mark question, six minutes answering a six mark question, etc. By adopting this approach, you can ensure that you do not run out of time in the exam or that you do not allow yourself too little time for the 18 mark question – a classic mistake, don't make it!

### Glossary

**Cognitive development:** changes in a person's mental processes (e.g., thinking, reasoning, mathematical ability) that occur over the course of their lifespan, from birth to old age.

**Consistency of care:** the stability of the care the child receives, which relates to staff turnover, how many caregivers the child has (staff: child ratio) and the routine the child can expect when in day care.

**Day care:** A form of temporary care where the child is cared for by someone not well known to them, usually outside the home.

**Individual differences:** differences between individuals in terms of, for example, personality. These differences can affect how a person responds to a situation, such as a shy, unsociable child responding to day care less favourably than a confident, outgoing child.

**Quality of care:** the standard of care a child receives, which relates to emotional involvement of caregiver, verbal interaction and the surroundings (environment) the child is in.

**Social development:** the development of a person's relationship with other individuals.

## Worksheet: Day Care

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do psychologists mean by the term 'cognitive development'?

-----  
-----

2. What do psychologists mean by the term 'social development'?

-----  
-----

3. What has research indicated about the effect of day care on a child's cognitive and social development? Name two studies that will support your answer.

-----  
-----

4. What is a problem with the outcome of research into the effects of day care on children's development? What is a possible explanation for this problem?

-----  
-----

5. What do psychologists mean by 'consistency of care'?

-----  
-----

6. What do psychologists mean by 'quality of care'?

-----  
-----

7. What factors, other than quality and consistency of care, may affect a child's experience of day care?

-----  
-----

8. How can day care be improved?

-----  
-----

9. True or false?

Research has found that day care always has positive effects on development \_\_\_\_\_

There is no way of improving day care \_\_\_\_\_

Only quality and consistency of care are important in consideration of the impact of day care on a child \_\_\_\_\_

Quality of care refers to the stability of the care the child receives \_\_\_\_\_

The standard of the care a child receives is known as 'quality of care' \_\_\_\_\_.

A study by Andersson (1992) suggested that high quality day care has positive outcomes for a child's cognitive development \_\_\_\_\_

Complete the following:

Research into the impact of day care on a child's.....and .....development has shown.....findings. Some studies suggest that day care has a .....effect on development, while other studies suggest that day care has a .....effect on development. These different findings can be understood more clearly by considering the .....and ..... of care that a child receives. It seems that .....quality and .....consistency of care promote a child's .....However, other factors must also be considered when thinking about the impact of day care on a child's development, such as age and .....in day care and .....differences. It is possible to improve day care by considering the .....and.....of care that it provides.