

The Influence of Early Child Care Arrangements and Psychological Characteristics on Child Development

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To all young women wondering.

It will be hard

but yes, you can

Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Andrea Papaloizou, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology) in the Graduate School of Health at the University of Technology Sydney. This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Format of Dissertation

This dissertation is presented as a conventional dissertation. It consists of a series of chapters which include an introduction, a literature review, and the results and discussion from a longitudinal cohort study.

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List of Presentations Arising from this Dissertation

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2. Papaloizou, A., (2020, July 3). *Children's Trajectories as a Function of Early Child Care Arrangements*. "3 Minute Thesis" competition, Heat 1, Graduate School of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.
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4. Papaloizou, A., (2021, September 13). *The Influence of Early Child Care Arrangements and Psychological Characteristics on Child Development*. [Seminar for provisional, registered and clinical psychologists in private practice]. Apex Psychology, Sydney, Australia.

Impact of SARS-CoV-2 on Research

I would like to acknowledge that half of this project was undertaken during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19) pandemic. Unfortunately, as a result, some unforeseen challenges interrupted and challenged this research.

The second and third data collection points that fell during 2020 aimed to assess how children adjusted to commencing kindergarten. In 2020, parents were obliged to keep children at home for a significant portion of the year, which impacted data collection and completion rates. Both parents and teachers were asked to complete lengthy surveys. The responses were limited, which may be partly accounted for by the increased stress placed on parents. Teachers were also overburdened with additional online teaching tasks or were not in the school environment at the time of data collection, which also impacted completion rates. Data collection was unable to take place in Catholic schools as most dioceses halted all external research, which again impacted recruitment. The unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 public health orders, parental anxiety and other unknowns on children's mental health may have affected the results of the study. This required alternative ways to be found to tell the story which had originally been envisaged within the context of the research thesis.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Day Care/Centre Based Care (CBC)	Care solely, or mostly, provided by a formal organisation in a group setting, such as day care, family day care, long day care or preschool.
Early Child Care Arrangement (ECCA)	Any arrangement prior to formal schooling where a child receives care and in/formal education.
Early Child Care Characteristics	The type, quantity and quality of ECCAs.
Early Intervention/Head Start Programs	A US government initiative to provide care and school readiness for children of low-income families.
Externalising Problems/Externalising Profile	Problems with controlling emotions and behaviour in an externally focused manner. These behaviours may be aggressive, defiant and hostile in nature.
Family Day Care	Care provided by registered educators who deliver education in an approved venue or at their residence.
Formal Child Care Arrangement (FCCA)	Formal care services provided on a commercial basis in out-of-home settings by an organisation or business. These include arrangements such as those mentioned under CBC.
Formal Schooling	Structured education delivered by teachers in primary and secondary school.
Grandparent Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by the grandparent/s of the child. This care can be provided in the family home or grandparent's home.
Home Based Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by someone employed to look after typically ≈3-7 children (who are not siblings), either in the child's or another's home.

Informal Child Care Arrangement (ICCA)	Informal care provided by parents, grandparents, relatives or non-relatives, usually in the family home. Includes some fee-for-service arrangements, such as the employment of nannies.
Internalising Problems/ Internalising Profile	Problems with controlling emotions and behaviour in an internally focused manner. These behaviours may be depressive, anxious or withdrawn in nature.
Kindergarten	Primary school foundation year (the year prior to year 1). In NSW, Australia, this is the first year of formal schooling.
Long Day Care	A type of centre-based care that typically operates for eight hours a day. This service is centred around the developmental needs and interests of each child.
Maternal Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by the mother of the child, usually in the home.
Nanny Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by someone employed to look after the child in their home.
Paternal Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by the father of the child, usually in the home.
Preschool Program	Includes services that provide a structured, play-based learning curriculum for children who are a year or two away from commencing full-time schooling, delivered by a degree-qualified teacher.
Psychological Characteristics/ Psychological Profile	Concerning psychological characteristics of behaviour in children that are commonly broken down into internalising and externalising profiles.
Relative Care	Care solely, or mostly, provided by relatives (other than the grandparent or parent) of the child, e.g. aunts and uncles. This care can be provided in the family home or the relatives' home.
Temperament	A child's unique nature which affects their reactivity, adjustment and self-regulation in their given environments.

Abstract

Research has shown that early child care arrangements (ECCAs) can nurture or hinder children's social, emotional and behavioural development. Much of the existing literature has shown contrasting or inconsistent findings. The role played by a child's psychological profile has seldom been explored in the context of ECCAs and child development. The relationship between these elements may provide explanations as to why some children are more or less susceptible to the effects of ECCAs. This quantitative, prospective cohort study explored how different ECCAs affected the outcomes of children with different psychological characteristics. Additionally, it assessed whether psychological profiles and/or ECCAs impacted a child's transition and adjustment to formal schooling.

A review of the existing literature was conducted to synthesise and clarify research examining how ECCAs impact child outcomes. A validation study was also conducted to develop and validate the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory-Short Form-Questionnaire (HOME-SF-Q). Parents of 4–6-year-old children in their final year of care prior to formal schooling were then invited to provide information about their child's current functioning three times over a 12-month period.

The validation study demonstrated that the HOME-SF-Q is a valid and reliable measure that can be used in future research studies to assess home environment quality. The cohort study revealed that ECCA type had less effect on the child than their own psychological characteristics. Internalising children continued to have emotional functioning difficulties throughout their ECCA and formal schooling experience. They also experienced social skills deficits while in their ECCA. Externalising children had both behavioural and social functioning difficulties throughout their ECCA and formal schooling experience. Combined children experienced the greatest difficulties of all the study subjects, as they exhibited social, emotional and behavioural functioning deficits throughout their ECCA and

formal schooling experience. In addition, internalising children functioned better in kindergarten emotionally and behaviourally if they had attended formal care but functioned better socially if they had attended informal care.

This study provides new insights into the relationship between ECCAs and children's psychological profiles. The results can be used to support revisions to government policy and improvements to clinical practice guidelines that include recognition of the implications of children's experiences in early care. Specifically, the findings can help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of children attending different types of ECCAs that can then be incorporated into treatment planning for 4–6-year-old children who exhibit internalising and externalising behaviours.