

“Some mothers choose to stay at home and look after their children while others have little choice in the matter and may feel quite worried about the effects of day care”. To what extent does day care affect the social and cognitive development of children?

As many changes have occurred over the past few decades, since the introduction of the 1976 Sex Discrimination Act, a greater number of women have entered the workforce. This has resulted in more and more children being looked after by adults other than their parents. Sometimes relatives are the care givers but many mothers don't have this option so need to seek child care in other areas such as; day nurseries, child minders, au pairs and nannies. According to The Institute of Fiscal Studies, approximately half of the women in the UK return to work within one year of giving birth and a further quarter will return after five years. This particular issue has caused many debates and arguments among psychologists as to whether day care is detrimental to a child's cognitive and social development. Many of these psychologists believe that child care has negative effects and that children would grow into emotionally and socially developed adults if they received all their pre-school care from their mothers and immediate family.

In a baby's early days, they begin to develop a special emotional relationship with the person or people who look after them. When this is formed the baby will try to stay close to that adult, and will appear to want to be cared for by that adult. Many psychologists believe this emotional bond as being extremely important to future mental health. This special emotional bond is known as an attachment bond. Attachment can be defined as “an affectionate two way relationship that is formed between an infant and another person”. When you are attached to someone, it makes you feel good to be in that person's company and also makes you feel anxious when they are not there.

Schaffer, 1996 divided the attachment process into several phases:

- Pre attachment phase – this phase lasts until about three months of age. From about six weeks, babies develop an attraction to other humans in preference to physical aspects of the environment.
- Indiscriminate phase – this phase lasts until about seven months of age. Infants begin to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar people.
- Discriminate phase – infants begin to develop specific attachments in this phase. They actively try to stay close to certain people (usually the

mother) and become distressed when separated from them, known as separation anxiety. Object permanence is obvious at this phase, when the infant can consistently tell the difference between the mother and other people. They are aware that their mother continues to exist even when they cannot be seen.

- Multiple attachment phase – from about nine months onwards. Strong additional ties are formed with other major care givers (such as the father, grandparents and siblings) and also with non-caregivers (such as other children).

Theories of the attachment process that involve contact with a caregiver (usually the mother) include:

- The psychoanalytic account of attachment says infants become attached to their caregivers (usually the mother) because of the caregiver's ability to satisfy instinctual needs. Instincts are "unlearned patterns of behaviour that exists in all members of a particular species, and which appear under certain circumstances". Freud believed that healthy attachments are formed when feeding practices satisfy the baby's needs for food and oral pleasure (oral stage of psychosexual development). Psychoanalytic accounts stress the importance of feeding, especially breast feeding, and of the maternal figure.
- The behaviourist's view of attachment also believes that infants form attachments with those who satisfy their physiological needs. Infants begin to associate their caregivers with the gratification and satisfaction of food (the caregiver acting as the conditioned or secondary reinforcer, and the food being an unconditioned or primary reinforcer). The infant will eventually begin to develop a sense of security when this caregiver is present.

These theories have been challenged by an Ethologists 'Harlow' whose studies involved monkeys. Harlow separated newborn monkeys from their mothers and raised them in individual cages. Each cage contained a baby blanket and the monkeys became intensely attached to them, showing a great deal of distress when the blanket were removed from them. This distress was in comparison to the distress shown by

other monkeys separated from their mothers. This study seemed to contradict the view that attachment comes from an association with nourishment. However, later research on the monkeys that had been raised with the blankets, seen that the monkeys became extremely aggressive adults, rarely interacting with other monkeys, they made inappropriate sexual responses and that they were difficult (if not impossible) to breed. This research seems to strengthen a theory that many psychologists, particularly Bowlby, made in relation to attachments made between the infant and its mother or substitute mother playing a significant part in shaping future mental health. John Bowlby is a major figure in motherhood and childcare. Bowlby's theory represents the most comprehensive theory of human attachment formation. He wrote a report for the World Health Organisation in 1951, reviewing expert opinions on the matter of motherhood and childcare. He argued that because new-born babies are entirely helpless, they are genetically programmed to behave towards their mothers in ways that ensure their survival. He also argued that the mother also inherits a genetic blueprint which programs her to respond to the baby. If this bond isn't allowed to form, or is broken, emotional development will be disrupted. Bowlby believed that infants display a strong innate tendency to become attached to one particular adult female (not necessarily the natural mother), a tendency he called monotropy. However, Bowlby's views on monotropy have been criticised as infants and young children display a whole wide range of attachment behaviours towards a variety of attachment figures other than the mother. Although Bowlby did not deny that children form multiple attachments, he saw attachment to the mother as being unique: it is the first to develop and is the strongest of all. Bowlby argued that the father is of no direct emotional significance to the young infant, but only of indirect value as an emotional and economic support for the mother. Bowlby's views on this were disputed by findings in a study carried out by Schaffer & Emerson showed that:

- Only half of the 18 month olds were most strongly attached to their mother
- Almost a third were most strongly attached to the father
- About 17 percent were equally attached to both parents.

During the 1940s and 1950s, John Bowlby studied how and why babies make attachments. Bowlby collected research findings about children's emotionally development, particularly children who has been separated from their mothers. He

concluded that a child whose mother goes out to work experiences maternal deprivation. If the mother returns to work within a child's first year, before an attachment has been formed, the attachment may not develop at all, this is known as privation. If she returns to work after an attachment has developed, the child will be distressed and may experience separation anxiety.

Many psychologists believe that day-care may affect children either positively or negatively. Bowlby believed that regular separation due to day care would prevent the infant from fully developing both socially and cognitively. However, Schaffer 1996 states that provided certain conditions are met, especially the stability and quality of care, the children do not suffer any ill effects and will benefit from them in certain respects. If infants receive a high quality of care and are engaged and stimulated the benefits seem to be evident. In day nurseries especially, children learn to interact socially with other children and adults, they learn to take turns, remember and follow directions and learn discipline. Scarr (1998) states that high quality day care provides learning opportunities, social and emotional supports that they would not enjoy at home.

Many studies have been carried out to measure social development (the development of the child's social competence including social skills, ability to relate and empathise with others and formation of close and meaningful relationships) and the effects of day care on children's cognitive development (the development of the child's mental processes such as thought, reasoning and memory). They have found that children who attended day nurseries often become a lot more active, outgoing, playful and less aggressive. A study by Shea (1981), where he videoed 3 and 4 year olds playing during the initial ten weeks at nursery, found that the child's sociability increased over that time. Clarke Stewart, 1989 states that several studies have shown that children who were in day care as infants do as well as those who were not, using measures of security, anxiety, self-confidence and emotional adjustment.

Research has proven that accessing day care and pre-school enrichment projects benefits children from disadvantaged communities. Scarr (1998) found that children from low-income families definitely benefit from high quality care. They achieved better at school and their behaviour appeared more socialised in later years compared to similar children who never received day care or had lower quality day care. Burchinal, Lee, and Ramey (1989) concluded that children who attended day-care and then went on to primary school entered at a higher IQ level than those who had been

at home with their mothers. They suggested the reason for this was because of the extra stimulation provided in day-care than at home. Another study by Clark-Stewart (1991) also found that 150 two to four year olds who has experienced day-care had better intellectual and social development than those who had received home care (either from their mothers or child minders). Children who had experience of day-care settings learned earlier how to cope in social situations and how to relate to their peers more appropriately. However, a study by Baydar and Brooks-Gunn's (1991) of 1181 children contradicts the positive effects of day-care and found that children were worse off, both cognitively and in behavioural terms when their mothers sent children to day-care before they were one year old.

A study by Tizard (1979) found that there were conversational differences between mother and child than those of teacher and child. This was irrespective of social class. He found that teachers had fewer exchanges to the children and those conversations between mother and child were a lot more complex. He felt this could possibly of been due to the teachers divided attention and also the less intimate relationship with the children. He emphasised that these conversational differences could be expected to affect the cognitive progress of the children.

Michael Rutter undertook a review of Bowlbys research in 1972. Rutter accepts that children need to form attachments, and that disruption of these attachments is distressing, but he argues that attending day-care centres is not inevitably traumatic as Bowlby's 1953 account may lead us to believe. However Bowlby himself did not specifically suggest that women should stay at home to look after their children, but logically looking at his studies, he states absent mothers mean unhappy children, surely that means mothers should be present full-time.

Rutter argues that it is important to distinguish between a child's need to form attachments, their need for basic care and their need to play. Meeting these needs can be shared among several people. So long as all three are available to the child, it does not matter who provides them, and in particular it does not matter if the mother does so.

No scientific evidence says that children are harmed when their mothers work. A child's development is influenced more by the emotional health of the family and the quality of care received from all involved in their care. A child who is emotionally well adjusted, well loved and well cared for should thrive regardless of whether the mother works or not. It would seem that as long as the care provided is sensitive,

stimulating and appropriately organised, day care does not provide as many negative outcomes as once thought.