



Debating Early Child Care

Rob Crosnoe, University of Texas

Tama Leventhal, Tufts University





Ryan: A major study Wendt commissioned of 1,364 children showed a clear link between parents' dumping their kids in day care and an increase in hyperactivity, lack of discipline, and violent behavior.

Will: Can I see that?

Josh: You're saying Jeffrey Dahmer's only problem was day care?

Ryan: We're always harping about the root causes of crime and violence.

Josh: I work for the federal government. I've never heard of Wendt's so-called "major federal study."

Will: Maybe that's because all TV news programs are produced by mothers who dump their kids in day care.

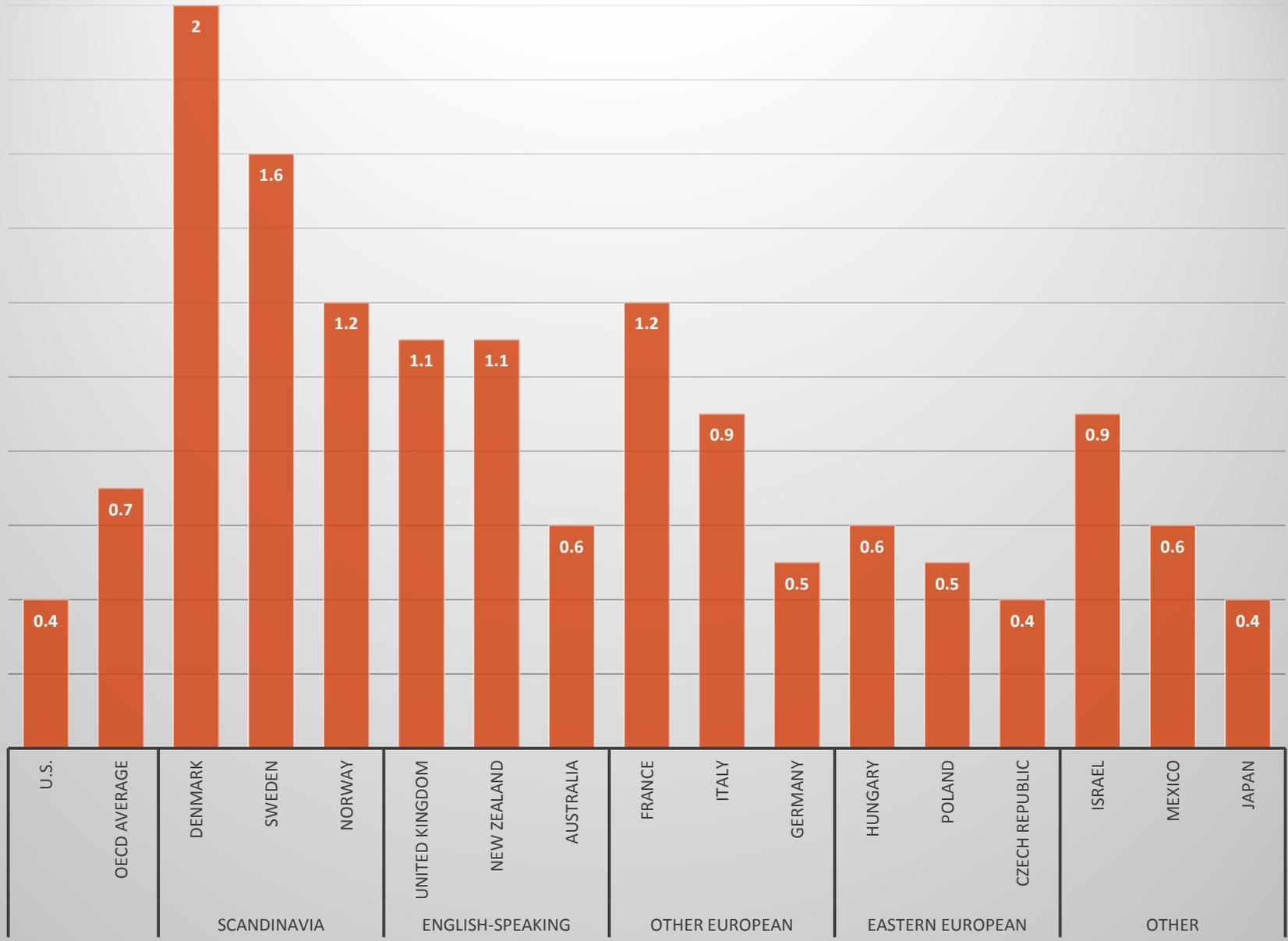


(From: "An Khe", the 102nd episode of the West Wing)





% GDP Spent on Early Care and Education in 2014





The Family Dimension of the Debate

- *My one conviction [is] that the Federal Government's role wherever possible should be one of assisting parents to purchase needed day care services in the private, open market. (President Nixon early)*
- *For the Federal Government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against [sic] the family-centered approach. (President Nixon later)*





The Child Dimension of the Debate

- Higher-quality child care, improvements in the quality of child care, and experience in center-type arrangements predicted better pre-academic skills and language performance at 4½ years. More hours of care predicted higher levels of behavior problems according to caregivers. (*American Education Research Journal*, 2004 Abstract)
- The most recent analysis of a long-term NIH-funded study found that children who received higher quality child care before entering kindergarten had better vocabulary scores in the fifth grade than did children who received lower quality care. The study authors also found that the more time children spent in center-based care before kindergarten, the more likely their sixth grade teachers were to report such problem behaviors as "gets in many fights," "disobedient at school," and "argues a lot." However, the researchers cautioned that the increase in vocabulary and problem behaviors was small, and that parenting quality was a much more important predictor of child development than was type, quantity, or quality, of child care. (NICHD Press Release for 2007 *Child Development* article)

The NICHD Study of Early Child Care
& Youth Development





Negative over Positive



- Sample Headlines

Study: Day Care Ups Odds of School Behavior (*Houston Chronicle*)

Study: Behavior Declines with More Day Care Time (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)



- Sample Lead

“A new, unsettling study from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development says children who spend more than 30 hours a week in child care are more likely to display aggressive behavior than children cared for by their mothers. Even high-quality care arrangements are said to show this effect.” (*Boston Globe*)





The Mommy War Context



- Sample Headlines
A Guilt-Edged Occasion. It Would Seem That Today's Moms Have Much to Celebrate. Instead, Many Are Feeling Insecure and Torn (*Boston Globe*)

Working Moms and Day Care: It's Life with a Guilt Edge (*Washington Post*)

- Sample Leads
“The mommy wars have heated up again with a new study that purports to show that children in non-maternal care are more likely to be aggressive and disobedient by the time they reach kindergarten than children who spend less time in day care.” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)

“Mothers should be the primary caretakers of infants during at least the first year to 18 months of life...It's better to drive junker cars and have sound kids, than to have pricey cars and neglected kids.” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*)





Lessons

- Focus on the Child *and* the Parents
- Use an Economic Argument

In today's economy, when having both parents in the workforce is an economic necessity for many families, we need affordable, high-quality childcare more than ever. It's not a nice-to-have, it's a must-have. So it's time we stop treating childcare as a side issue, or as a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us. (President Obama's 2015 State of the Union)

