

'Children in nurseries more likely to be aggressive and disobedient'

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More than 700,000 children attend nursery for more than four hours a day

Children who spend a lot of time in nursery are more likely to be aggressive and disobedient throughout primary school, according to research.

The problems are believed to persist for some years, with primary school teachers reporting more problems with such children, saying that even at the age of 11, they are 'getting into fights' or 'arguing a lot'.

Those who went to exclusive nurseries were found to be just as likely to misbehave.

The findings will renew the debate on whether working women who put their children into nurseries may be damaging their children's health by doing so at too young an age.

It will also raise questions for those who believe the Government is encouraging mothers to return to work early.

Official figures released last year showed the number of babies and toddlers who spend most of each day in nurseries had shot up by nearly a third in only five years.

More than 700,000 children attend nursery for more than four hours a day as ever-greater numbers of mothers choose to combine having families with pursuing a full-time career.

And more than half of mothers of children under two now have full-time or part-time jobs.

The results came from a continuing study of 1,364 children from the age of one month onwards.

The research by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in America, defined child care as care by anyone other than the child's mother for 10 hours or more a week.

The research, published in the Easter edition of the journal *Child Development*, found the more time children spent in child care, the more likely their primary school teachers were to report problem behaviour.

But the researchers added that the quality of parenting gave a more significant indication of child development.

Lead author of the report Jay Belsky, director of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at Birkbeck College, University of London, said:

'Good quality care simply does not protect against these developmental consequences (like aggression), I am truly sorry to say, at least not in the USA.'

The findings will raise questions for parents who frequently pay £12,000 to £16,000 a year in London and the Home Counties to send children to a local nursery.

They operate 51 weeks a year and are often open between 7.30am and 7pm.