



A small-scale randomized efficacy trial of Carescapes: Enhancing children's social development in child care homes[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The quality of the child care environment and caregiver practices can potentially have significant, lasting impact on children's social development. This study involves the development and a small-scale efficacy trial of the Carescapes program, a video-based training program that focuses on promoting positive social development in young children attending family child care. Fifty-seven caregivers who provided child care in their homes were randomly assigned to immediate intervention or waitlist control groups. Random coefficients analyses showed significant increased use of effective behavior management practices and decreased overall children's problem behavior for the intervention group. A mediation model demonstrated that increases in effective behavior management practices were associated with decreases in problem behavior. A medium intervention effect was found for caregiver's monitoring and a small effect for use of positive attention. These effects declined 5 months following the intervention. Implications for future efficacy and effectiveness studies in family child care settings that involve strategies to facilitate maintenance are discussed.

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Children experience the greatest rate of development during the first 5 years of their lives, and besides the family environment, child care is the setting in which this growth predominately occurs (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Child care is typically the first experience young children will have with a group of other young children, and thus plausibly can facilitate positive interactions and the formation of positive relationships among children, as well as the development of socially skilled behavior in young children. Evidence supports positive influence of child care quality on social outcomes (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997; Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987). Yet the NICHD large-scale study of Early Child Care and Youth Development brings into question whether child care quality has a lasting positive influence on children's social development (Belsky et al., 2007; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003, 2004). Differential findings likely depend on the child's age when the care is provided, the way in which child care quality is defined, and what social outcomes are assessed.

Much less is known about the extent to which the quality of care in family child care settings influences children's social development. In family child care settings, the care of children is provided in the caregiver's home. It is difficult to articulate empirical evidence that is solely pertinent to family child care as many studies have combined data from family and center-based care, or equivocal results have been found in the studies of family child care, likely due to low sample sizes or poor research designs (Kontos, 1992). A number of more recent studies have demonstrated that training for caregivers who provide child care in their homes was related to greater quality of caregiving practices. Care providers in family child care settings

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with higher levels of training have been found to provide higher overall quality of child care (Norris, 2001; Weaver, 2002). Both level of education and training were shown to predict quality of caregiving in child care homes (Burchinal, Howes, & Kontos, 2002) and these predictions were stronger than those of adult–child ratio and caregiver experience.

Specific caregiver practices that have been associated with higher levels of training are more frequent engagement with children (Bordin, Machida, & Varnell, 2000), less detachment from children (Burchinal et al., 2002), and a greater likelihood for planning of child activities (Kontos, Howes, & Galinsky, 1996). Although these caregiver practices have been shown to promote positive social development in children in center-based child care (e.g., Dunn, 1993; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips, & Grajek, 1985; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001), the studies in family child care settings did not directly investigate the impact of these caregiver practices on children's behavior. A meta-analysis of caregiver training studies confirms positive impact of caregiver training on caregiver practices in regular child care and preschools, with fewer studies and weaker effects found for children's skills and behavior (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). These results were found to generalize to child care providers with varying levels of education.

1. The importance of facilitating positive social development in young children

A number of social skills in young children have been identified as important to overall social competence and peer acceptance. These include effective initiation of interactive social play, effective social responses, and cooperative interactions such as offering help and sharing (Odom & Ogawa, 1992). Children who lack such social skills are likely to experience a range of social problems and difficulties, such as peer rejection and aggression from playmates (Olson, 1992). Children lacking in social competencies are also at risk for developing internalizing problems, such as social withdrawal and anxiety (Olson & Rosenblum, 1998).

Social problems first identified during the preschool years tend to be stable (Richman, Stevenson, & Graham, 1982), and are likely to increase in severity over time (Walker, 1995). Children who enter school with social behavior problems, such as oppositional behavior and aggression, are at elevated risk for continued social difficulties throughout elementary school (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Mesman, Bongers, & Koot, 2001) and for exhibiting antisocial behavior during adolescence (Loeber, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Attending to ways in which caregivers of young children in community settings can facilitate social competencies and prevent the development and escalation of such problems is essential.

Although a few studies have investigated longitudinal effects of early childhood intervention programs on social adjustment problems in youth, these studies have mainly been conducted in more formal preschool and center-based child care settings, such as the Perry Preschool Program (Schweinhart, Berrueta-Clement, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1985) and the Abecedarian Project (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). To develop a broader reach of these effective practices, it is important to intervene in additional forms of community settings in which young children spend a substantial amount of time.

2. Variable quality of child care in home settings

About 3.7 million toddlers and preschool-age children in the United States spend an average of 26 h per week in family child care settings (Mulligan, Brimhall, West, & Chapman, 2005). Compared to center-based care, the quality of care in family child care varies greatly (Goelman & Pence, 1990). Caregivers in family child care are likely to have lower levels of education and training compared to those providing center-based care (Howes & Hamilton, 1993) and the environments are less likely to be safe and designed for age-appropriate activities (Howes, 1983). Children from low-income families are more likely to attend family child care than center-based child care (Frankel, 1994; Hofferth, Shauman, Henke, & West, 1998), which may be due to availability and affordability. Unfortunately, it is the low-income children who are likely to attend the family child care settings with the lowest quality ratings (Goelman & Pence, 1990). Thus, the young children who are at risk of developing social and behavioral problems (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994) are the ones who are more likely to spend a substantial amount of time receiving low quality child care. Improvements in the quality of family child care, particularly in the ways in which social development is nurtured and child behaviors are managed, would likely have long-term positive influence on many at-risk children.

3. Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate the efficacy of Carescapes, a video-based training program to give family child care providers strategies in facilitating children's social development, proactive approaches for managing children's behavior, and ways to promote positive behavior in children who exhibit frequent challenging behaviors. Video-based instruction is particularly useful in disseminating effective behavioral intervention strategies in community settings because of its efficiency and potential for wide reach. Although empirically validated programs involving teacher training, parent training, and children's social skills training exist, few applied settings have implemented them (Carnine, 1997; Kazdin, 1991). A key reason appears to be that there are practical obstacles for implementing programs that require substantial resources. Video-based programs can offer a more efficient and affordable format for providing quality training to child care providers.

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