Daycare Bombshell Hits The "Village"

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The advocates of "it take a village to raise a child" are having a rough month. They are scurrying around trying to come up with arguments to refute the new study showing that children who spend most of their time in daycare are three times as likely to exhibit behavior problems in kindergarten as those who are cared for primarily by their mothers.
Children who spend more than 30 hours a week in daycare were found to be more demanding, more noncompliant, and more aggressive. They scored higher on things like gets in lots of fights, cruelty, bullying, meanness, talking too much, and making demands that must be met immediately.

The study found a direct correlation between time spent in daycare and a child's aggression, defiance and disobedience. The findings held true regardless of the type or quality of daycare, the sex of the child, the family's socioeconomic status, or the quality of the mother care.

Why is anybody surprised that social science research is confirming reality? True science always verifies reality; it's only junk science that manufactures illusions based on ideologies.

The new study followed more than 1,100 children in ten cities in every kind of daycare setting, from care with relatives and nannies to preschool and large daycare centers. The study was financed by the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development, a branch of the National Institutes of Health that produced a daycare-friendly report in 1996.

The "village" advocates are swarming all over the media with their feeble rebuttals. They argue, without evidence, that better quality daycare might produce different results, that the real problem is that employed parents are tired and stressed, and that the study hasn't undergone rigorous peer review.

Of course, there are other variables, including viewing television, the divorce of parents, and the amount of father care. But this new study is the most comprehensive to date and its findings are by significant margins.

The new study corroborates the 1986 findings of one of its principal investigators, Dr. Jay Belsky, who shocked the child development world with an article entitled "Infant Day Care: A Cause for Concern?" Belsky reported on the evidence then piling up that infants who spent long hours in daycare were at risk of behavioral problems later.

At that time, the daycare industry and the "village" advocates in the child development field were preparing to launch a national advertising campaign for federally funded, federally regulated daycare as a new middle-class entitlement. They felt threatened by this article by Belsky, then just a young associate professor at Pennsylvania State University.

So, the daycare industry lowered the professional boom on the upstart professor who dared to challenge the then prevailing feminist notion that commercial daycare was what infants really needed so that their mothers could be fulfilling themselves in the labor force. The word went out: don't buy Belsky's textbook, shun him at professional meetings, label him a misogynist.

The reason the daycare issue arouses such bitter antagonism is not only that it challenges the liberals who want to expand government social services by having the "village" take over raising children. The daycare

issue also strikes at the heart of feminist ideology that it is oppression of women for society to expect mothers to care for their own children.

Feminist ideology teaches that equality for women depends on the government relieving women of the burden of child care so they can be advancing in the labor force. Any evidence that shows commercial daycare inferior to mother care, therefore, must be destroyed and the messengers vilified.

Remarkably, Belsky didn't kowtow to the Politically Correct gestapo as so many academics have done. He is now a professor at the University of London and this time he was joined in his research by some of the country's most respected child development experts.

In 1988, the daycare industry, with lobbying help and media access from the Children's Defense Fund, went ahead with its lavish national advertising campaign, proclaiming the lack of sufficient daycare a national "crisis," and offering the ABC Child Care Bill sponsored by Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) as the solution. Their three-year congressional and media battle failed; the American people are not willing to provide tax-paid baby-sitters for other people's children.

Hillary Clinton made another attempt to peddle the notion of a daycare "crisis" as her "frontier issue" in 1997. She hosted an exclusive shindig at the White House featuring all the usual suspects of those who want the "village" to raise children, such as her friend Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund, but the American people turned a deaf ear to her cries of "crisis."

The conservative solution to child care needs has always been tax credits, i.e., let the parents spend their own money for the child care of their choice, and don't force mothers taking care of their own children to subsidize babysitters for employed moms. Fortunately, we've made some progress in legislating child credits into the income tax code.