

A generation of 'little savages' raised in nurseries as daycare is linked to aggression in toddlers

By Gerri Peev



Worried: Psychologist and Writer Oliver James believes daycare can lead to children becoming more aggressive

A rapid increase in nursery places has led to a generation of violent 'little savages', psychologist Oliver James has warned.

Mr James, the best-selling author of books on child-rearing, said ministerial proposals to allow childcarers to look after more youngsters would fuel aggression in the under-threes which would have lasting effects.

Shoving youngsters in to nurseries was simply 'warehousing' them so that the government could push mothers back to work to reap income for the Exchequer, he argued.

Nursery places in Britain have expanded at the same time as a rise in violence in primary school classrooms.

The author of *How Not to F*** Them Up* said: 'We start off as Barbarians and what makes us civilised is being loved and looked after.'

'If you are an 18 month-old in a nursery, it is impossible for you not to feel threatened. You are surrounded by savages and you are a little savage too.'

Mr James criticised Education Minister Elizabeth Truss's proposal to allow childminders and nursery staff to care for more children with fewer employees.

He told the Mail: 'To try and look after three young toddlers is hard but to try and look after four is just mad. How on earth do you do that well and meet their needs?'

Mr James pointed to a study in America which tracked youngsters for 15 years. It showed a correlation between the hours placed with nursery to increased aggression and bad behaviour, reported by both parents and nursery workers.

'Studies show there is a direct link between how many hours you spend in daycare up to the age of four and a half and how aggressive you are.'

The Mail has also highlighted how 40 primary school children in England are expelled every day for assaulting their teachers.

Violence levels have soared most in the South East – rising 41 per cent from 2006/7 to 2010/11.

Some 8,030 pupils aged five to 11 received were expelled in 2010/11 – a 15 per cent rise over four years.

'The explosion of violence in the classroom is very plausibly linked to the rise of daycare under New Labour,' Mr James said.

'Since this generation of primary kids are the ones who are reaping the harvest of Harriet Harman and her colleagues' plans of turning SureStart into a giant creche, it is not surprising that we are seeing more violence.



Wrong path: Elizabeth Truss's plans for more children to be cared for by fewer teachers have been criticised

'No one can deny that daycare increases aggressiveness of toddlers. A toddler raised at home with a single carer is six times less likely to be aggressive than one enduring more than 45 hours a week daycare and the more daycare a child has, the greater the aggression. This aggression is sustained and predicts greater problems in primary schools.'

Mr James pointed out that politicians often did not use day care and themselves hired nannies to care for their children.

He said there was a need for British-based research to study the long-term effects on children who are 'warehoused' in nurseries.

Instead of expanding nursery places or encouraging childminders to take on more youngsters, the government should create a network of nannies.

Government proposals to demand higher qualifications from nursery staff would do little to raise the standards of care, Mr James added.

He said: 'There are armies of East European women who do not have any training in childcare at all but many are far better than indigenous childcarers who scrape through school and are doing it for the money, often spending the day texting their boyfriends.'

Fulltime nursery places in England soared from 431,600 to 721,500 between 2003 and 2011, according to official figures provided by the Family and Parenting Institute and Daycare Trust [MUST CREDIT].

Jill Rutter, research manager for the Family and Parenting Institute and Daycare Trust said: 'Oliver James uses evidence from the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development childcare study as evidence that nurseries fuel child aggression. Yes, he is right in one way: long hours of nursery care were associated with increased behavioral problems in children of four and five in this study. But the same study showed that this was a small effect compared with the quality of parenting. Moreover, children who attended high quality nurseries were much less likely to experience later behavioural problems.'

She added that nannies may be better for babies but few parents could afford the £25,000 to £30,000 cost. 'Nurseries or registered childminders are the only affordable option for most parents. Given this reality and the findings of the US study about the effects of quality, we should be promoting quality nursery and childminder care, rather than criticising working parents.'

The charity has itself opposed any loosening of the ratios for children, warning that the quality of care would suffer.

A Department for Education spokesman said: 'This research is about children spending time away from their parents; it is not about nursery staff: child ratios.

He added: 'In fact, the best education systems consistently prioritise staff quality over the size of classes, as the OECD has said. Nursery staff qualifications are crucial when it comes to the quality of early education.' Loosening the ratios would make childcare more in line with other European countries and give nurseries freedom to hire 'better-paid, better-qualified professionals'.

'This will help to ensure that young children are prepared for school, and set them on the right path for decades ahead.'

Andreas Schleicher, deputy director for education and special adviser on Education policy at the OECD, said: 'High performing education systems consistently prioritise the quality of their staff over the size of classes. OECD's work on early childhood education underlines the importance of having staff with proper educational qualifications and that staff qualifications are the best predictor of the quality of early childhood education and care.'