

# CONCERNS ABOUT CHILD CARE

Bill Muehlenberg  
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## Introduction

Modern life is full of pressures which were not around just several decades ago. Today the battle to pay off the family home and meet other financial needs is becoming increasingly more difficult. A single wage is often not sufficient. As a result more and more families are relying on two incomes to get them through. The need for out of home child care has therefore risen markedly. Moreover, the large increase in the number of single parents has also meant a greater demand for formal child care.

With over \$1.5 billion a year spent on child care by Australian Governments, child care is big business. And with over 600,000 children involved, it affects a lot of people.<sup>1</sup> There is no denying that child care is a growth industry. Indeed, Commonwealth spending alone has risen 160 per cent between 1991 and 2001. In 2001 dollars it grew from \$573 million to \$1,490 million.<sup>2</sup>

But with the growth there have been questions raised. Concerns about child care are being expressed from a number of quarters. How does parental absence affect the child? With growing numbers of children being raised by strangers, what effects will this have on society in the near future? It is important that these questions and concerns are addressed before more growth takes place. This paper will examine some of these considerations.

### I. Day care can be harmful to children

The most important question in the child care debate (and the one that is least asked) is this: "How does it affect the child?" Most discussions about child care revolve around issues like employment or a woman's right to choose. Seldom is the child given any consideration. As family psychologist Steve Biddulph has said, "Childcare was not invented for children's sakes, but for adult needs".<sup>3</sup> Or as Anne Manne put it, "In this issue, those affected most deeply, children, are wordless, hence cannot be participants in that conversation".<sup>4</sup> What then are the effects long term day care can have on young children?

Numerous international studies have shown that maternal deprivation at an early age can affect the mother-child bonding process, and can impair a child's emotional, social and psychological development. For example, a major 1990 American report found that a higher proportion of children under age one in day care "show anxious-avoidance attachment to their mothers than do home-reared infants".<sup>5</sup> More recent research has found that maternal separation can profoundly affect the brain's biochemistry, with lifelong consequences for growth and mental ability.<sup>6</sup> Commenting on the new research, Mary Carlson of the Harvard Medical School said, "Our findings support clinical research showing that infants cared for in institutions grow slowly and have behavioural retardation".<sup>7</sup>

The work of people like John Bowlby,<sup>8 9</sup> Selma Fraiberg,<sup>10</sup> Robert Karen<sup>11</sup>, Jay Belsky,<sup>12 13</sup> Ronald Haskins<sup>14</sup> and Mary Ainsworth<sup>15</sup>, to name but a few, has shown a clear connection between extended periods of maternal absence, and lengthy stays in day care (as little as 10 hours a week) for infants, and later developmental problems.

Not only is the important role of instilling values, purpose and responsibility best met by a child's biological parents at an early age, but so too is the cultivation of a sense of security and well-being. Indeed, as one expert put it, the attachment relationship that a young child forges with his mother "forms the foundation stone of personality."<sup>16</sup> Regular and prolonged detachment from the mother can demonstrably impair a child's intellectual and emotional development, and affect a child throughout his or her life.

Studies in bonding and attachment theory have shown that a child's emotional and mental well-being are inexorably tied up with continuous, sustained, stable physical and emotional contact between mother and child. Taking the child away from its mother during this critical period can result in a number of harmful results: "Children deprived of parental care in early childhood are likely to be withdrawn, disruptive, insecure, or even intellectually stunted. New research [even suggests] that the depression resulting from separation anxiety in early childhood can cause a permanent impairment of the immune system making these children prone to physical illness through their lives."<sup>17</sup>

A parent's absence or inaccessibility, either physical or emotional, can have a profound effect on a child's emotional health. Harvard psychiatrist Armand Nicholi has observed that individuals who suffer from severe nonorganic emotional illness have one thing in common: they all have experienced the "absence of a parent through death, divorce, a time demanding job or other reasons".<sup>18</sup>

One study from Norway, for example, found that children experiencing less maternal care than others had higher levels of behaviour problems.<sup>19</sup> Learning can also be impaired. Ernest Foyer, former U.S. commissioner of education, and president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has said that children in day care suffer in terms of language skills development.<sup>20</sup> A recent American study of 4000 children found that mothers who return to work soon after giving birth may harm their child's school performance. The study showed that children of mums who work full-time struggled academically compared with those whose mums stayed at home.<sup>21</sup> Other studies have even found that children who spend a lot of time in child care are more likely to join gangs as surrogate families.<sup>22</sup>

A recent 10-year study involving 1,300 American children found that the more hours that toddlers spend in child care, the more likely they are to turn out aggressive, disobedient and defiant. The researchers said the correlation held true regardless of whether the children came from rich or poor homes.<sup>23</sup>

More recent American studies bear this out. The largest long term, which began in 1991, conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that the longer the hours a child stays in day care, the more aggressive, disobedient and difficult to get along with they become. And the Institute of Child Development of the University of Minnesota found similar problems of aggression and anxiety among young children who spend long hours in day care.<sup>24</sup>

An American study published in 2003 found that babies in childcare are more likely to show behavioral problems and low self-control later in life. The study of 17,000 children found that those who had the most problems were those who were in care for more than 30 hours a week and who were in day care before the age of one.<sup>25</sup>

A more recent long-term study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in the US found that "spending a year or more in a long-daycare centre increases the likelihood that a child will be disruptive at school". The effect can last until the child is 11 or 12. The study said that the child's gender, family's income level and quality of daycare made no difference to its conclusions.<sup>26</sup>

Educational psychologist Burton White, director of the Harvard Preschool Project, has written extensively on the subject of nonparental care. This is how he summarises his experience: "After more than 20 years research on how children develop well, I would not think of putting a child of my own into any substitute care program on a full-time basis, especially a center-based program."<sup>27</sup>

Babies need a mother's love and attention. Child development experts indicate that children do not engage in peer play until they are about two years old.<sup>28</sup> The late psychoanalyst Selma Fraiberg said that babies need mother most of the time until age three, and afterwards, can tolerate a half day's absence.<sup>29</sup> As Connie Marshner sums up, "The quality of love and care that a child receives in the first three to five years of life is

the main factor in whether that child will be able to think, to learn, to love, to care, to cooperate with other people - in short, whether that child will merely exist or will thrive and flourish and add to human society".<sup>30</sup>

Some Australian researchers have sought to dismiss overseas studies which suggest that child care can have negative consequences for young children. Some Australian studies seem to tone down or explain away findings on any adverse effects on children. Yet they too have to admit that children brought up in long hours of day care are more aggressive, bratty and uncooperative.<sup>31</sup> Even though they try to put a good spin on such findings, and say such brattiness is not a sign of "emotional maladjustment", any teacher or parent will tell you otherwise. (For an excellent analysis of the many shortcomings of this and other studies, see *Early Child Care* by Peter Cook.<sup>32</sup>) Indeed, other Australian researchers have found that these bratty preschoolers are more likely to grow up to be chronic drink-drivers.<sup>33</sup> Other Australian studies have found that children do better in school if they have not been in child care.<sup>34 35</sup>

It is true that some of the earlier studies on child care seemed to show little difference between home-raised children and those in day care. But that research focused on high-quality, university-sponsored child care centres. By the late 1970s, psychologists began to study children in much more typical day care centres. Insecure attachment was noted in the children, along with delays in cognitive performance. "Suddenly, the effects of day care no longer seemed so benign. . . . Some psychologists started to wonder whether children ought to be placed in day care at all."<sup>36</sup>

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that there is not widespread agreement on the negative effects of extended periods of day care. But if there is uncertainty, then it seems to me that the benefit of doubt should go in favour of children, and those who argue that day care does not harm children should bear the burden of proof.

Let's illustrate it this way: suppose you go to a doctor who tells you an injection might be a) very harmful; b) moderately harmful; or c) effects are unknown. Most people wouldn't take the injection under those circumstances. The situation is the same here - if we are not certain about the long-term effects of day care on young children, why unnecessarily put them at risk? Why treat them as guinea pigs?

One further problem that needs to be noted is the possibility of child care centres becoming places of child neglect. Increasingly there will be the temptation to use day care centres as places to dump children. This becomes more possible as day care centres' hours are extended. In Victoria child care centres will soon be allowed to remain open 24 hours a day, with no limits on how long a child can be left in care.<sup>37</sup> Recently in Geelong a 24-hour child care centre did open.<sup>38</sup>

One child care spokeswoman warned, "Childcare is not a place just to deposit your child and get on with your life".<sup>39</sup> The head of the National Childcare Accreditation Council, Ms Quentin Bryce, said, "There are some children in childcare for nearly as long as they are in the whole of their primary and secondary schooling, which is staggering to a lot of people".<sup>40</sup>

More recent proposals in Victoria include no limits on the hours a child can be there, and assistants as young as 15 being allowed to work in centres. The proposals have prompted some to speak of "warehousing children".<sup>41 42</sup> Speaking of such proposed changes, Ms Celia Haddock of the Community Childcare Association of Victoria said, "We are meant to be family support, not boarding centres".<sup>43</sup>

In addition, a number of studies from here and overseas have shown that there is a much higher risk of physical health problems associated with day care.<sup>44 45 46</sup> Colds, diarrhoea, coughs, hepatitis A, respiratory complaints, mumps, measles, influenza, cytomegalovirus, meningitis are some of the medical problems which abound in day care centres.<sup>47 48 49</sup> One Australian study for example found that "children prone to respiratory illness were more likely to be users of child care centres or creches than the children who were not prone".<sup>50</sup> Another study of 23 long-day-care centres in Canberra found that on average children there suffered six more respiratory infections a year compared with children not in care.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, some of these infections can be passed on to the parents.<sup>52</sup> A recent study of 450 children at 20 Darwin daycare centres found that workers there have poor standards of basic hygiene. The children at the centres pick up on average 15 infections a year.<sup>53</sup>

Other studies from here and overseas have found that the diets of children in long day care can be missing out on essential nutrients.<sup>54</sup> For example, a Norwegian study found that toddlers who attend day care or nursery school are twice as likely to develop asthma.<sup>55</sup>

One explanation that physicians offer for the higher rates of disease amongst children in day care is the issue of breastfeeding. Mothers who put quite young children into day care for long periods are obviously unable to breastfeed their children. And we know that breastfeeding of infants strengthens their immune systems which substantially reduces their risks of getting various diseases.<sup>56</sup>

Other studies have found that not only are children in day care at greater risk of disease, they are also at greater risk of being abused. A recent study conducted for the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect in America found that there is a “substantial” risk of sexual abuse in day care centres.<sup>57</sup> In another study, 75 per cent of sexual abuse victims in Michigan were day care children.<sup>58</sup> Children can also be neglected in child care centres. Numerous complaints have been made about babies and toddlers being left alone in child care centres.<sup>59</sup> In other instances, children have been found to have wandered off from child care centres.<sup>60</sup>

## II. Quality in day care

Much is made of quality in discussions about child care. The ironic part of all this is if we are really concerned about quality in raising our children, why not promote the best source of quality? Why not allow the best carers - mum and dad - real freedom of choice to be able to care for their own children? An abundance of studies have made it clear that what babies and toddlers need most is the continuous one-to-one attention of a caregiver. This can rarely be obtained in group care. For one thing, the ratio of children to staff is often 15 to 1, or worse, and secondly, there is a very high turnover rate of staff at day care centres. As one expert put it, “Many childcare youngsters will spend 12,000 hours in care before they reach school, with dozens of different carers - and that’s if they stay at one creche!”<sup>61</sup> Thus, no matter how excellent a facility may be, it can never replace a mother’s continuous love and attention. Common sense, as well as sociological studies, bear this out.

Obviously there are many good daycare centres and many devoted daycare staff. But children do not need “expert” professionals, they need committed carers, and who better than parents to provide that commitment and love? Indeed, no child care worker, no matter how skilled, can replace the love, attention and devotion of its own mother. This is how one mother put it:

“While I - and most of my friends - were saying our minds were ‘too good’ to stay at home and raise our children, none of us ever asked the question, ‘Then what sort of minds *should* be raising our children - minds that were *not* very good?’ My carefully worded advertisements for childcare literally came back to haunt me. . . I wanted someone who would encourage my children’s creativity, take them on interesting outings, answer all their little questions, and rock them to sleep. I wanted someone who would be a ‘part of the family.’ Slowly, painfully, after really thinking about what I wanted for my children and rewriting advertisement after advertisement, I came to the stunning realization that the person I was looking for was right under my nose. I had been desperately trying to hire me.”<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, as Penelope Leach has said in her important book, *Children First*: “It is clearly and certainly best for babies to have something close to full-time mother care for six months at least - conveniently linked with breast-feeding - and family care for a further year and better two. Using financial or career penalties to blackmail women into leaving infants who are scarcely settled into life outside wombs that are still bleeding is no less than barbarous.”<sup>63</sup>

She goes on, “However carefully she is fed, washed and protected, and however many mobiles are hung for her, a baby’s overall care is not good enough to ensure her optimal development unless she is constantly with people who know her as an individual and who always have the time (and usually the inclination) to listen to and answer her; to cuddle and play, show and share. These are the people she will attach herself to and that attachment matters.”<sup>64</sup>

Even if the above argument is accepted, the response of some is still: “Why not put more tax dollars into day care, to improve quality and service, in order to replicate that home environment?” There are several problems with this. First, the better a daycare centre is, the more it costs. Thus low income families tend to lose out. And

as Patricia Morgan explains, “Affordable care is *low-quality* care. Universally available *high-quality* care is achievable nowhere on earth”.<sup>65</sup>

Second, daycare work is a thankless and underpaid job. To enable daycarers to better perform their tasks, they need all the comforts other workers get; rostered time off, lunch and tea breaks, shift work, vacation time. But this is the Catch 22 situation: the better we make working conditions for the carers, the more we disadvantage the infant! That is, the more flexi-time we give the carer, the less continuous, long-term attention the baby gets from one carer.

Why not simply give financial help to the one most likely to be committed to the child’s well-being - the mother? Daycare can never come up to this standard. As Leach says, “That vital continuous one-to-one attention can rarely be achieved in group care, however excellent the facility may be. Babies in their first year need one primary adult each, and while that may be inconvenient, it is not very surprising. Human beings do not give birth to litters but almost always to single babies.”<sup>66</sup> Or as Anne Manne put it: “Children need most not trained, expert, professional care, but the passionate partiality of parental love. That love is not reproducible, just as to be a mother is not reproducible. Caring is.”<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the more we hear from feminists that the solution is to just spend more money on better quality care, the more it sounds like they are seeking to approximate the very place they do not want kids to be – at home with mum. As commentator Richard Lowry remarks, the “search for the holy grail of high-quality care will be everlasting, like the quest for the elusive ‘true Marxism’. What distinguishes high-quality care is lots of intense, personal attention (cooing, stroking, bouncing, babbling) over an extended period of time – in other words, exactly what real mothers would do, but for an hourly wage. This kind of care is hard to find, and expensive.”<sup>68</sup>

If child care is necessary, keeping it in the home is the best option. As one child psychiatrist said, “The best substitute parents are extended family members - grandparents, uncles and aunts, for example - who have a genuine emotional interest in the child”.<sup>69</sup> Evidently most parents believe this as well. In America nearly half the non-mother child care is provided by family members or relatives.<sup>70</sup> In Australia, the same situation can be found. Only 34 per cent of children aged four and under receive some formal care.<sup>71</sup>

And child care experts even concede this point in the choices they make. A 1996 survey of Macquarie University early child care students with experience in day care found that not one student said they would put their baby in a child care centre.<sup>72</sup>

### III. Preference for home

Feminist commentators continue to insist that most women want to be in the paid workforce, and therefore we need to expand formal day care and related services. Pamela Bone is one such writer who regularly argues that there is no preference for home, and that we need to do more to get women into the paid workplace. She wrote recently, “The idea that women want to stay home is being pushed by a few very privileged, conservative women writers. If the welfare of children really were their main concern they would be pushing for better parental leave and family-friendly workplaces.”<sup>73</sup>

The facts however point to just the opposite conclusion.. A number of surveys have found that most mums would prefer to be at home with their small children. Many feel they are conscripted into the paid workforce against their wishes, but tough economic times often compel them to do so. Yet a majority of mothers with young children have consistently said that they would rather be at home for the first year or two of their child. One survey of 4511 adults found that 69 per cent of respondents preferred that the mother stay home when she had pre-school children.<sup>74</sup> Australian National University research found that only 4 per cent of respondents felt that women with pre-school kids should work full time, while only 31 per cent thought they should be in the labour force part time.<sup>75</sup> Another survey discovered that one-third of working women who put their infants in child care centres would prefer not to work if they had the choice.<sup>76</sup>

A comprehensive study undertaken in Britain has showed an overwhelming preference for home. The study found that 81 per cent of mothers would choose to stay home if they could afford to. Only 6 per cent said they wanted to continue working full-time.<sup>77</sup> And a major Australian study has found very similar views. The 2001

study discovered that while only two per cent of mothers thought mothers should work full time when their children are of pre-school age, a large majority (71 per cent) thought it best to stay at home.<sup>78</sup>

A 1997 survey by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that 83 per cent of women and 84 per cent of men believe that mothers should not work full-time, even when their youngest child is at school. Almost two-thirds of the respondents felt that families suffered if women work full-time.<sup>79</sup>

The small percentage of Australians who actually use formal child care is testimony to this preference for home. Only 7.6 per cent of babies under one year are in formal care (centre or family day care), while 33.6 per cent use informal care (grandmothers, nannies). Most are cared for by their parents all the time.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, it appears that the rush to the workforce by women has dropped off dramatically. While the overall percentage of women in the workforce increased from 15 per cent in 1955 to 61.5 per cent in 1990, since then the participation rate has grown by less than 0.5 per cent.<sup>81</sup>

And in America, the country that led the campaign to get women into the workplace, the trend is decidedly away from career and moving towards home. More and more women workers, including many professional women and leading executives, are leaving work to spend time at home with the children. As of June 2003, the number of stay-at-home mums was up by 13 per cent in less than a decade.<sup>82</sup>

Studies also show that the increased use of child care services is due to economic pressures on families, not to parental preference or any perceived benefit to the child. One survey found that 86 per cent of mothers agreed that the financial situation had forced many women into the paid workforce.<sup>83</sup> A 1993 random survey by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association found that 72.4 per cent of female members said they worked for financial reasons.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, the numbers bear this out: only around 14 per cent of families with children under five have both adults in the full-time workforce.<sup>85 86</sup> A survey of 3000 women conducted by *New Idea* found that 70 per cent believed that raising children properly is the most important thing in life.<sup>87</sup> Also, a study of 600 parents revealed that three-quarters of workers with children would consider refusing a job, promotion or transfer if it meant spending less time with their family.<sup>88</sup> Another study of working mothers with preschool children found that two-thirds worked for the money.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, many parents put so much money into child care and related costs, that the financial gain of being in the paid workforce is minimal. One study for example found that some families even lose money overall, with child care costs exceeding the amount of income earned by the mother.<sup>90</sup> Another study found that some women were effectively earning less than \$2 an hour after child care costs, taxes and reductions in family payments were considered.<sup>91</sup>

A more recent study found that Australian mothers who return to full-time work are financially disadvantaged. The study found that mums with two or more children are often worse off financially when they work full-time rather than part-time, despite child-care benefits.<sup>92</sup>

Also, a number of economists have pointed out that work done in the home provides a great deal of value to society, even though it is not given recognition in the GDP. One study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1994 found this unpaid work to be worth \$150 billion a year.<sup>93</sup> Another study by Prof. Duncan Ironmonger put the figure at \$340 billion a year.<sup>94</sup> Yet this is all unrecognised and unrewarded labour.

#### **IV. Choice for women**

This raises the question of equity. Why should mothers who choose to stay at home with their young children receive no or little financial support, while mothers who put their children into formal daycare and return to the paid work force get various benefits, subsidies and financial assistance for doing so? Why are stay-at-home mums in effect penalised (eg, via the taxation system), while non-stay-at-home mums are rewarded? Why should dual income families receive government subsidies for day care when single income families receive no or very little by way of subsidies? Why this discrimination? Governments should not be in the

business of showing partiality to one kind of mother over another. It should treat all mums fairly. This is not a call for special favours or rights for stay at home mums, simply equity and fairness.

It seems that there are some groups with vested interests in government and elsewhere (eg., the feminist lobby) which are very eager to urge women into the paid work force. For example, in March 1995 feminist Eva Cox rebuked women who chose to stay at home and said that all women should be in the market economy.<sup>95</sup> Governments should not allow feminists or any other special interest group to hijack family policy and resort to social engineering.

What agenda is being pushed by those calling for more and more day care? Why are some so intent in taking women out of the home, and so intent on institutionalising children? There are some radical feminists who have made it clear that this is their goal. The child care mentality is an integral part of feminist theory. Consider a few quotes:

“The care of the young is infinitely better left to trained professionals rather than to harried amateurs with little time nor taste for the education of young minds”<sup>96</sup>

“No woman should be authorised to stay at home and raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have the choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.”<sup>97</sup>

“A variety of ways have been suggested for reducing [women’s] desire for babies. One commonly suggested proposal to achieve this goal is greater encouragement of labor-force participation by women. . . . [Perhaps girls could] be given an electric shock whenever they see a picture of an adorable baby until the very thought of motherhood becomes anathema to them. . . .”<sup>98</sup>

“The heart of woman’s oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles.”<sup>99</sup>

“In order to raise children with equality, we must take them away from families and communally raise them.”<sup>100</sup>

“Unless women have, from the moment of birth, socialization for, expectations of, and preparation for a viable significant alternative to motherhood . . . women will continue to want and reproduce too many children.”<sup>101</sup>

Of course these are extremist positions, not held by the majority of women. But such thinking does have influence. The feminist agenda clearly has had some impact. Marian Sawer’s 1990 book, *Sisters in Suits* describes the success of the feminist bureaucracy in Canberra in achieving its goals.<sup>102</sup> Child care has certainly been one of the big winners. As Michael Duffy has said, “Feminism in the form we have it today could not exist without childcare.”<sup>103</sup>

Anne Manne puts it even more forcefully: “Feminism’s political evolution has meant that in practice, if not in theory, it successfully delivers the family type most suited to survival in contemporary capitalism - the affluent, dual-income, high consumption family with self-fulfilment as the binding value, with functions once performed within the family contracted out. These are the new economic winners. Families with children, sole parents or with a single income, and certainly the unemployed, are far more likely to be in the ranks of the new poor - they are the economic losers”.<sup>104</sup>

One has to ask why so much government policy seems intent on fulfilling the aspirations of some of these radical feminists. If the majority of young mums with young children would rather be at home, why does government policy so often promote the opposite? Indeed, why the double jeopardy for these women? Why must stay-at-home mums forego economic relief for child care while at the same time have to, through taxation, subsidise those who do?. Says Patricia Morgan, “Whatever else might be said about families with a mother at home, they are every bit as deserving of relief as families with employed mothers”.<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, it is time women reclaimed motherhood, and stopped listening to the myths of the gender feminists. Our children are our future. And no one can better care for a child than his or her mother. Of course, a father’s role is vital as well.<sup>106</sup> But we must recognise that the job of motherhood is the most important and most

valuable occupation of all. As one mother puts it, “Women must begin to view motherhood as something they get to do rather than something they have to squeeze into their hectic career lives. Motherhood is a career, not a sideline occupation.”<sup>107</sup> And societies need to recognise and reward that most vital of careers.

## V. Recommendations

1) Governments should not dictate to parents where and how they seek to raise their children. A system of child care subsidy should be established in which all parents receive benefits which they can choose to use as they wish. They could redeem it for care outside the home, or redeem it for cash if they choose to care for their own children at home. A child tax credit/benefit, as proposed by Barry Maley of the Centre for Independent Studies, might be one possibility.<sup>108</sup> The system we are proposing includes these considerations:

- The policy should treat all families with young children equally; it should not discriminate against families where the mother makes an economic sacrifice to remain at home to care for her own children.
- The excessive tax burden placed on traditional (one-income) families should be reduced. Tax cuts should result in additional funds placed directly in the hands of parents, instead of bureaucrats and social service professionals.
- It should give the greatest support to low-income employed families with children.
- It should maximise choice; parents should be able to select day care from non-professional centres, from relatives, etc.
- It should not discriminate against religious day care centres.
- It should keep regulation localised. At best, it should be state-wide, not federally, controlled.

Such a deregulated, decentralised system would provide protection against the kind of silliness that was proposed in 1993 by the then Family Minister Senator Crowley. She issued a set of guidelines on child care with such gems as: no Christmas carols; no use of negative commands; books should only depict androgynous, gender-neutral role-modelling, etc.<sup>109 110</sup> It would also protect against an incident that took place in 1995, in which a private child care centre was reported to have had its accreditation downgraded by Government officials because the children said grace before their lunch.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, the call for regulation has even extended to informal care. Two NSW researchers produced a study which purported to show that children actually suffer in informal care.<sup>112</sup> They recommended that grandparents and other informal carers be accredited before allowed to look after children.<sup>113</sup> The next step may be to call for parenting licenses. Indeed, this has already been proposed in some circles.<sup>114</sup>

2) The taxation system should be changed to allow for concessions for families depending on the number of children they have. The tax-free threshold should go up incrementally depending on the number of children in the family. Perhaps figures like \$2000 per preschool children and \$1500 for children aged 6 and up could be mooted.

## Conclusion

The modern child care experiment is developing apace. But questions need to be asked - and answered - before we allow it to run out of control. The impact not only on children, but on society, needs to be carefully assessed. One Stanford University psychologist has remarked that with the mass exodus of children into daycare, “we are altering the cultural fabric” of society.<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, anthropologist Margaret Mead once noted the radical shifts that must take place to break the mother-child bond: “The mother’s nurturing tie to her child is apparently so deeply rooted in the actual biological conditions of conception and gestation, birth and suckling, that only fairly complicated social arrangements can break it down entirely. . . . Women may be said to be mothers unless they are taught to deny their child-bearing qualities. Society must distort their sense of themselves, pervert their inherent growth-patterns, perpetuate a series of learning-outrages upon them, before they will cease to want to provide, at least for a few years, for the child they have already nourished for nine months within the safe circle of their own bodies.”<sup>116</sup>

Such a massive social transformation cannot proceed without major repercussions. Some groups will applaud such changes, seeing them as a sign of progress. Others, however, may view such changes as retrograde and



regressive. As social analyst Peter Drucker once put it, “We are busily unmaking one of the proudest social achievements in the nineteenth century, which was to take married women out of the work force so they could devote themselves to family and children.”<sup>117</sup>

<sup>1</sup> EPAC, *Future Child Care Provision in Australia. Interim Report*. Canberra: Economic Planning Advisory Commission, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Amanda Vanstone, “Fact Sheet: Child Care Assistance,” August 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Biddulph, “A creche can’t love them,” *The Herald Sun*, 7 April 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Manne, “Electing a New Child,” *Quadrant*, January-February 1996, pp. 8-19.

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