

# THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL ATTENTION RECEIVED BY CHILDREN LIVING WITH THEIR MOTHERS IN SPANISH PRISONS

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*In the wider context of a project whose objective was to study the development of children living with their mothers in prisons up to age three, an assessment was carried out of the quality of educational attention offered by nurseries within the four mother and baby units within the Spanish prison service. The instrument used was the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (Harm, Cryer, and Clifford, 1990). The data reveal that the quality of educational attention varies markedly from one centre to another: while in some cases the average score can be considered acceptable (4 out of a possible 7), in others it is clearly insufficient (2.2). The aspects scoring highest were classroom interaction and language activities; on the other hand, the lowest scores were for personal care routines and learning activities. Finally these scores are compared with those of external public nurseries, and some suggestions are made for improving the quality of these programmes and the conditions in which they are provided.*

*Como parte de una investigación cuyo objetivo era estudiar el desarrollo de los niños que residen con sus madres en centros penitenciarios hasta los 3 años, se evaluó la calidad de la atención educativa de las escuelas infantiles en el interior de las cuatro unidades de madres dependientes de la administración penitenciaria estatal. El instrumento empleado fue la Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990). Los datos revelan que la calidad de la atención educativa varía notablemente de unos centros a otros: mientras en unos casos la puntuación media puede considerarse aceptable (4 sobre un máximo de 7), en otros resulta claramente insuficiente (2.2). Los aspectos que resultan mejor valorados son la interacción en el aula y las actividades de lenguaje; por su parte, los que reciben una puntuación más baja se refieren a las rutinas de cuidados personales y a las actividades de aprendizaje. Finalmente, se comparan estas puntuaciones con las de las escuelas infantiles públicas del exterior y se realizan algunas sugerencias para mejorar las condiciones en las que se ofrecen estos programas, así como la calidad de la atención educativa que reciben estos niños y niñas.*

A frequently-forgotten aspect of the reality of the women who, in increasing numbers, are serving prison sentences, is that the majority – with percentages ranging from 57 to 80 depending on the study and the country – are mothers (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Mumola, 2000; Subdirección General de Sanidad Penitenciaria, 1994). Their incarceration, more than that of fathers, is an enormously destabilizing event both for the young children and for the family as a whole (Baunach, 1985; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Hale, 1988; Jaffé, Pons & Rey, 1997). Moreover, custodial sentences for women in this situation raise legal, penal, social and ethical questions to which society appears to have not yet found a satisfactory response.

One way of dealing with this situation is to allow the

young children of these women to live for a given period with their mothers in the prison. Thus, in spite of the debate over the issue, the presence of children with their mothers in prison is currently a reality in the majority of countries. Leaving aside the conditions of internment (regime, visits, parole, family contacts, etc.) and specific services (paediatricians, nurseries, programmes, etc.) provided for mothers and children in different countries, the most notable differences refer to the age at which children are allowed to stay with their mothers, which in general ranges from 18 months to 6 or 7 years, the largest group being those countries in which they can accompany their mothers until age three (Alliance of NGOs, 1987; Caddle, 1998).

In Spain, imprisoned women with young children have the possibility of being accompanied by their children in special penitentiary units until the age of three. At the time of this study there were four mother and baby units within the Spanish prison service: two in the province of Madrid (Madrid I and Madrid II), one in a village near Seville, and one near Valencia. These mother and baby units are closed-regime facilities, situated in modules

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physically separate from the rest of the prison, and equipped with nurseries and paediatric services.

Given the virtually total absence of empirical studies in Spain on the living and developmental conditions of children in such units, we carried out a study on a national scale financed by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (Jiménez, 2002; Jiménez & Palacios, 1998). In general terms, our data coincide with those of previous studies in describing the prison context of the children as one characterized by substantial restrictions on movement, on access to materials and toys, and on the variety of daily activities and social experience (Birtsch & Rosenkranz, 1988; Catan, 1988, 1992; Catan & Lloyd, 1989; Gabel & Girard, 1995; Giménez-Salinas, 1988, Jaffe, Pons & Rey, 1997). In this situation, the timetables are extremely stable, and the activities quite predictable for mothers and children. For the latter, the spaces in which they live their everyday lives are the cell, the common spaces (lounges and yards) and, for those over 4 or 6 months, the nursery. The only exceptions to this rule are provided by occasional visits from family, special activities and excursions organized for the children by NGO volunteers.

However, in addition to the limitations deriving from the structural deficits of prison as a developmental context, our data indicate that the quality of stimulation coming from the mother herself in the privacy of the cell, as assessed by the HOME scale (Caldwell & Bradley, 1984), is, in general, extraordinarily low (25.7).

In view of such findings, attention turns to the quality of the stimulation children may receive in the nurseries they attend at the prisons, and which might play a compensatory role of unquestionable importance in their development (Andersson, 1989; Broberg, Wessels, Lamb & Hwang, 1997; Caughy, DiPietro, Strobino, 1994; Ladd & Price, 1987; McCartney, 1984; Tramontana, Hooper, Selzer, 1988). Without doubt, a crucial aspect in relation to this compensatory role refers to the potential link between the family rearing scenario and the nursery school context. Although in principle it is desirable for there to be some degree of continuity between the two (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1985; Laosa, 1982), it seems to be demonstrated that differences between school and family contexts are not necessarily related to negative results in children: indeed, it is the children from the most disadvantaged family backgrounds who benefit most from discrepancies between their developmental contexts (Kontos, 1992). Thus, though some authors have highlighted the lack of continuity between the ideas of mothers and those of teachers (Oliva & Palacios, 1997) or, for example, the different use of language (Bernstein, 1961), it seems clear that the two contexts have their own differentiating

characteristics (Clarke-Stewart, 1991) and that, in certain circumstances, the influence of school may have a compensatory effect on the child's development.

For this reason, and with the aim of obtaining a general measure of the quality of attention and rearing in prison nurseries, we used the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990) in visits to different mother and baby units. Moreover, and with the purpose of putting the assessment of the prison nurseries in context, we selected four nurseries from outside run by a regional authority, the Andalusian Social Services Institute (*Instituto Andaluz de Servicios Sociales*, IASS) all located in Seville or its province. Two of these nurseries were situated in the same village as the prison, and were in fact attended by children from the mother and baby unit from the age of 18 months onwards. The other two were in neighbourhoods of the city of Seville with serious social problems.

Although the majority of parents and caregivers consider that nurseries should form part of the everyday life of small children, the truth is that there is still a notable lack of research in Spain which would help to establish the quality criteria that should inspire the characteristics and functioning of such institutions and their activities. A reflection of this reality is that up to now there were no studies in this country that had used the ITERS scale. This is due in part to the fact that the majority of the research on the pre-school period has been carried out with children of three years and over – just the opposite of the case here. Nevertheless, the continuity observed between the ITERS (0-30 months) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms & Clifford, 1980), for children aged 3-6 years, may help us to situate the data from our study in the wider context of the quality of pre-school education in Spain. Thus, for example, in a study comparing the quality of childcare and education in five European countries (Tietze, Cryer, Bairrao, Palacios & Wetzel, 1996), the Spanish data for the 3 to 6-year-olds indicate that 71% of the centres assessed obtained an average score (between 3 and 5 points), while 14% were scored as inadequate (between 1 and 3 points). However, in a study carried out in Seville province in 59 classrooms of 5-year-olds, Lera (1996) obtained a mean of 3.59 in the public centres, finding that only 29% of these fulfilled minimum quality levels.

In contrast, the ITERS assessment data for nurseries in the USA give a considerably more favourable picture (Ontai, Hinrichs, Beard & Wilcox, 2002). Thus, prior to their inclusion in the Early Head Start improvement programme, the mean score of the participating nurseries was 4.41, with a range in the different subscales of the

test from 4.66 (personal care routines) to 3.95 (learning activities). After implementation of the programme, the mean score of these nurseries had risen to 5.06, with a range of subscale scores from 5.56 (personal care routines) to 4.08 (adult needs).

As regards the use of ITERS in the European (and more particularly, Mediterranean) context, the study by Petrogiannis and Melhuish (1996) permitted the identification of some centres in which educational attention could be considered of a minimum or inadequate standard, though, on the whole, the mean scores obtained are merely low (3.5), with the highest values being for the "Classroom Interaction" subscale. More recently, Petrogiannis (2002) has reported a clear relationship between the quality of preschool programmes assessed with ITERS and some of the main developmental parameters in young children.

Thus, the objective of the work presented here is to study the principal parameters of the educational attention received by children in prison nurseries and assess its quality.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

In accordance with the prison standards currently in force in Spain, all four of the mother and baby units have a nursery equipped with specialist staff. These nurseries are within the walls of the prison itself. The provision of materials and their renovation is the responsibility of non-governmental associations working in the prison service context.

Of the 109 children living in the mother and baby units at the time of the study, only 75 attended the prison nurseries on the days on which our assessments were made. This is due, apart from absences due to illness, to the fact that children in the mother and baby units began attendance at the nursery at 4 or 6 months, depending on the prison. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the children living in the Seville and Madrid I prisons started at public nurseries outside the prison at 18 months in the case of Seville and at 2 years in the case of Madrid I.

As far as some of the characteristic features of these children are concerned, the majority of them (63.7%) were born while their mother was in prison, 54.3% were girls, and mean age was just over 16 months (16:3). Although there is proper obstetric attention and children's health care is under medical supervision at all times, 13.4% of births in these women were premature (between 32 and 34 weeks), while the most notable health problems among the children were nutritional and gastric disorders (anaemia, bilious attacks, etc.), affecting 2%, and viral illnesses, such as HIV+ (9.4%) or hepatitis (7.9%).

As regards the four public nurseries involved in the study (run by the IASS regional authority), these were attended by children aged 1 to 3 years. The nurseries were assessed by adding up their scores and taking an average to obtain a general reference of quality in the non-prison environment.

During the observation period, the number of children per class in the mother and baby unit nurseries ranged from 7 to 13, whilst in the IASS nurseries it was slightly higher (8-15). As far as the mean adult-child ratio is concerned, this was 1:7 in the prisons and 1:10 in the public nurseries.

### *Instruments*

As already pointed out, in order to assess the quality of educational attention, we used the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale* (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990). This instrument is an adaptation of the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (ECERS) (Harms & Clifford, 1980), designed to provide a general view, as well as data on some more detailed aspects, of the quality of attention received by children up to age 30 months in nurseries. As a basis for defining the standards of quality the authors used both research data and the ideas and practical knowledge of caregivers. ITERS is based on a broad conception of the educational context that includes the organization of space, interactions, activities, children's schedules and the needs of parents and staff. Moreover, the definition of quality in ITERS is consistent with the criteria of programmes set up by diverse bodies, such as the *National Academy of Early Childhood Programs* (NAEYC, 1984).

In the present study, the observations were carried out by two researchers especially trained in the use of the scale. The ITERS is applied through observation to a group or class, and comprises 35 items organized in 7 subscales measuring different aspects of educational attention. Table 1 shows the 7 subscales and 35 items making up the ITERS.

As it can be seen, each subscale includes a number of items that can be assessed with the help of a list of exhaustively defined descriptors. Each of these items can be scored 1 to 7, allowing both overall scores and scores by specific aspects. For overall scores, the sum is calculated of the scores obtained in each subscale, and this figure is divided by the total number of items assessed in the test. This provides a score reflecting the quality of the educational attention, which will be more positive the closer it is to 7, and more negative the closer it is to 1. Even so, the scale provides a quality index of a qualitative nature with four categories, and which classifies the assessed environment according to the proximity of its score to each criterion score: inadequate (1), minimum (3), good (5) and excellent (7).

According to the authors (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990), inter-observer reliability for the scale as a whole is 0.84, varying among the different subscales between 0.58 and 0.89. The Spearman correlation coefficient for test-retest reliability with regard to the whole scale is 0.79, while the figure for its variation in the different subscales ranges from 0.58 to 0.76. As for the scale's internal consistency, it can be considered high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. In the present work, inter-observer agreement ranged from 63% to 87%.

As far as validity is concerned, the studies that have used it would appear to show that ITERS performs very well in tests of internal and external validity (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990). In the latter aspect, the authors report high rates of agreement (83%) between experts' assessments and ITERS scores. Furthermore, the comparison of ITERS with another seven widely used

assessment instruments showed that 82% of the ITERS items were included in other tools, whilst a mean of 75% of the items from these other instruments were covered by ITERS, suggesting that ITERS is a valid tool for measuring the quality of educational attention in early childhood.

## RESULTS

### *Description of the educational spaces in the Mother and Baby Units of Spanish prisons*

With the exception of the mother and baby unit in Valencia, whose nursery is situated on the ground floor of one of the normal prison modules, the children's day-centres of the prisons are in separate buildings. The facilities in Madrid I and, most especially, Madrid II, stand out from the rest. In the case of the latter institution, the nursery is modern, with spaces and equipment designed with the needs of children and caregivers in mind. In contrast, in the Seville and Valencia prisons, the children's facilities are housed in buildings designed for other uses and subsequently adapted, with a resulting lack of space, and a distribution clearly suited to purposes other than those of a nursery.

As far as exterior spaces are concerned, all the nurseries have a yard or garden with play facilities, normally adjacent to the day-centre itself, and for use during school time. Among the common fixed facilities are swings, slides, see-saws and climbing frames. Some (Madrid I and Madrid II) have a small swimming pool for use in the summer. As regards other play equipment, most provide hoops or tyres, sand or earth, Wendy Houses, tricycles, balls, and so on. Within the obvious limitations of a prison environment (extremely obtrusive security fencing), it could be said that the exterior facilities in Seville and Madrid I are the most pleasant, due principally to the absence of concrete and the presence of trees and gardens.

### *Quality of educational attention*

The data from the ITERS clearly indicate the considerable differences in the quality of educational attention offered by the different nurseries studied. This is illustrated by the comparison between the scores obtained by the facilities at the four prisons and those of the public nurseries, which appears in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 shows, in general terms the centres scoring highest on the scale are Madrid I and Madrid II. In either case, scores with mean values are obtained (4 and 3.85, respectively), so that the quality of educational attention received by the children at these nurseries can be said to be above the required minimum level of quality, though there is undoubtedly room for improvement in some specific aspects, to which we shall refer below. The

**Table 1**  
**Overview of the Subscales and Items of the ITERS**  
*35 Items organized into 7 Subscales*

<p><b>1. Furnishings and Display for Children</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Furnishings for routine care (feeding and sleeping, storage of child's possessions)</li> <li>2. Use of furnishings for learning activities</li> <li>3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort</li> <li>4. Room arrangement</li> <li>5. Display for children</li> </ol> <p><b>2. Personal Care Routines</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Greeting/departing</li> <li>7. Meals/snacks</li> <li>8. Nap</li> <li>9. Diapering/toileting</li> <li>10. Personal grooming</li> <li>11. Health practice</li> <li>12. Health policy</li> <li>13. Safety practice</li> <li>14. Safety policy</li> </ol> <p><b>3. Listening and Talking</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Informal use of language</li> <li>16. Books and pictures</li> </ol> <p><b>4. Learning Activities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Eye-hand coordination</li> <li>18. Active physical play</li> <li>19. Art</li> <li>20. Music and movement</li> <li>21. Blocks</li> <li>22. Pretend play</li> <li>23. Sand and water play</li> <li>24. Cultural awareness</li> </ol> <p><b>5. Classroom Interaction</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25. Peer interaction</li> <li>26. Caregiver-child interaction</li> <li>27. Discipline</li> </ol> <p><b>6. Programme Structure</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28. Schedule of daily activities</li> <li>29. Supervision of daily activities</li> <li>30. Staff cooperation</li> <li>31. Provisions for exceptional children</li> </ol> <p><b>7. Adult Needs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. Adult personal needs</li> <li>33. Opportunities for professional growth</li> <li>34. Adult meeting area</li> <li>35. Provisions for parents</li> </ol>
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same could be said of the public centres run by the IASS, whose scores are slightly below those of Madrid I and II (3.57). In contrast, the nurseries in the Seville and Valencia prisons obtained markedly lower scores (2.31 and 2.26, respectively), indicating that the educational attention received by the children in these centres falls well short of minimum standards in the majority of the aspects measured by the ITERS. Although overall comparison of the scores obtained by the prison nurseries (mean of 3.03 points, with a standard deviation of 0.88) and those obtained by the public centres (mean of 3.57 points, with a standard deviation of 0.48), marginally favours the latter group, this is clearly due to the considerable differences in quality between some of the mother and baby unit nurseries and others.

On analyzing in more detail the scores obtained in the various aspects assessed, we find that there are also substantial differences between some nurseries and others (see Figure 2). The most marked differences concern activities aimed at promoting interaction between the children and between children and teacher (from a minimum score of 2.3 to a maximum of 5.6), informal use of language (from 2.5 to 5.5) and, thirdly, the furnishings and display/material for the children (from 2.2 to 4.6). Another aspect in which differences can be appreciated, albeit smaller ones (less than 2 points), is the assessment of the educational programme in the nurseries.

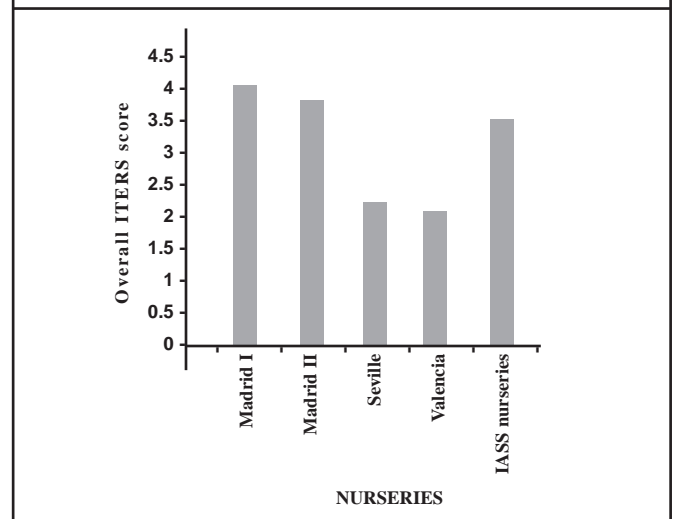
On the other hand, despite the differences between the nurseries studied, the aspect with the most favourable assessment overall is precisely that of classroom interactions (mean of 4.4 points), followed by informal use of language (3.7), furnishings and display (3.6) and educational programmes (3.6). In contrast, the aspects with the lowest scores, and for which there is most homogeneity in the data across all the centres studied are personal care routines (mean of 2.2), adult needs (2.3) and the practice of learning activities (2.6).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

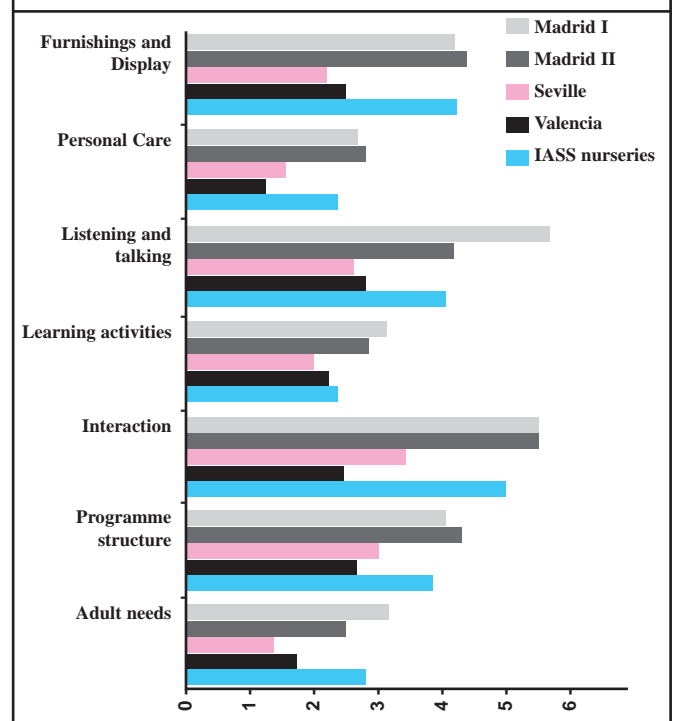
The present study is the first in Spain to examine educational attention inside mother and baby units in prisons. Before entering into more detailed considerations of the assessment carried out, we should stress that this attention is not provided in the same conditions in all the prisons. One of the most noteworthy aspects is that the age at which the children begin pre-school care differs between prisons (from age 4-6 months where nurseries are inside the prison to 18-24 months where they attend centres outside). Likewise, whilst at some prisons the children have the opportunity of attending nurseries outside the prison, at others this is not an option (Madrid II and Valencia). There are two issues underlying these differences: on the one hand, the degree of isolation of the

prisons, often quite far away even from the nearest village, and on the other, the social rejection incited in some cases by attempts to integrate the prisoners' children. As regards the spaces and infrastructure of these nurseries, there are, as we have seen, substantial differences between them. These differences are related to the

**Figure 1**  
Overall ITERS score for nurseries in prison Mother and Baby Units and for a sample of nurseries run by the Andalusian Social Services (IASS)



**Figure 2**  
ITERS subscale scores for nurseries in prison Mother and Baby Units and for a sample of nurseries run by the Andalusian Social Services (IASS)



limitations of space and facilities deriving from the use and adaptation of buildings that were not originally designed to serve as nurseries (Seville and Valencia).

### *The quality of educational attention*

The present work has highlighted the fact that what is found in prison nurseries is not always very encouraging; nor does it give much grounds for hope with respect to compensation of the deficiencies associated with the low level of stimulation received by the children in the relationship with their mothers, or with respect to the structural and functional limitations of the prison facilities. Our data show that there is marked variation as regards the quality of the educational attention provided in the mother and baby units and that, even in the highest-scoring cases, much improvement is needed before it can be considered truly adequate. As we have seen, considered overall, the nurseries offering the best-quality educational attention are those of Madrid I and Madrid II. On the other hand, at the centres in Seville and Valencia the attention clearly leaves room for improvement in the majority of aspects assessed.

Nor are the findings any more favourable with regard to structural aspects: both the adult-child ratio and the size of the groups appear to be (in both the nurseries in the mother and baby units and those run by the regional authority) far higher than is advised for this age group by researchers and experts, who suggest ratios of between 1:3 and 1:5, depending on the study and the country in which it was carried out (Petrogiannis & Melhuish, 1996; Van der Eyken, Osborn & Butler, 1984).

It would appear to be clear that the aspect with the most favourable rating in all the nurseries is that of classroom interaction, and this is consistent with the data from other research carried out in Spain (Lera, 1996; Tietze, Cryer, Bairrao, Palacios & Wetzel, 1996). In general, it seems that contact between the children and the caregiver tends to be empathic, warm and positive, and that despite the control exercised, the children are free with regard to their groups and movements. On a second level, there are also favourable assessments for the informal use of language in activities of listening and talking, for the furnishings and display/material for the children, and for the educational programme. At the other extreme, the indications are that the subscales which obtain the lowest score in all the nurseries and at all levels are personal care routines and adult needs. In the former case, the low scores are related on the one hand to lack of hygienic toilet/washing and nappy-changing habits (toileting and diapering), and on the other, to the stiff health and safety demands of the ITERS criteria. Moreover, the rating ends up being inadequate due to the

fact that this subscale includes aspects such as greeting and departing, which cannot receive a positive score since, in the majority of cases, mothers are not allowed to take their children to the nursery, and have minimal contact with the caregivers. In the latter case, it is clear that with regard to adult needs the assessment cannot be positive, due largely to the lack of appropriate spaces for caregivers' meetings and for receiving mothers, to the lack of contact between caregivers and mothers already mentioned, and to the total absence of training and professional growth activities among the staff of these nurseries. Finally, although it seems clear that in the nurseries studied there is considerable need for improvement in the area of learning activities, the low scores are due partly to the differences between some centres and others (particularly Madrid I and Madrid II, as compared to the rest), and also to the presence of babies in some of the groups (from age 4 or 6 months), which restricts the implementation of plastic and musical activities, certain types of games, and so on.

An interesting aspect of the data concerns the variability of the scores in the different subscales. Considered overall, it seems clear that the aspects of quality of educational attention which are most favourably rated are also those where there are the greatest differences between the nurseries of the different prisons. We should take careful note, therefore, of the enormous distance separating, for example, the Madrid II nursery and that of Valencia with regard to interactions (5.63 and 2.3, respectively) or that between Madrid I and Seville in language activities (5.5 and 2.5, respectively). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the aspects in which the assessment is least favourable are precisely those for which the differences between the different centres are smallest, which is particularly true in the case of learning activities and in that of personal care routines. This leads us to consider the need to undertake improvements of a global nature in some nurseries with the aim of attaining minimally acceptable standards, whilst in others, whose rating can be generally considered as more positive, intervention strategies should work towards improving the quality of attention in certain specific areas.

It is obvious, to judge from the data presented here, that the overall comparison of the quality of prison nurseries with those run by the regional authority (IASS) is misleading, given the wide variation in educational attention quality from one prison facility to another. While it is indeed the case that the quality in the public nurseries of reference, which these children could attend if they were living with their families is, in general terms, slightly inferior to that offered by the better mother and baby unit nurseries, it should nevertheless be borne in

mind that all the centres run by the IASS obtained scores above 3 (that is, above the minimum quality criteria), with only very slight differences between them. Thus, first of all, it is clear that nurseries in the public system should also work towards improvements of a general nature, but above all in the specific areas of personal care routines, learning activities and adult needs; and secondly, it is equally clear that in the current state of affairs, the public system is in a position to offer educational attention that tends to guarantee minimum levels of quality, something which does not seem to be guaranteed in all prison nurseries.

We should not forget, in any case, the importance of the regional authority nurseries in their capacity as external centres which children living in mother and baby units attend. Clearly, from the point of view of their future integration and the enrichment of their social experience, the attendance of these children at nurseries situated outside the prison walls that are also attended by children who live "normally" with their families is positive. It would therefore be desirable to extend this practice to children in all mother and baby units, though this should not imply neglecting the quality of educational attention that would continue to be provided in the prison nurseries.

As regards situating our data in a wider context of quality, the principal conclusion that can be drawn in the light of the extremely scarce research to date in Spain is that the situation of quality observed in prison nurseries (and in regional authority nurseries used by prisons) is not so different from that observed in pre-school education as whole in this country (Lera, 1996; Tietze, Cryer, Bairo, Palacios & Wetzl, 1996) and in some other European countries (Petrogiannis, 2002; Petrogiannis & Melhuish, 1996), which is in clear contrast to the situation in the USA, as reflected by data from recent studies carried out in nurseries there (Ontai, Hinrichs, Beard & Wilcox, 2002).

In general terms, the situation in Spain would appear to be dominated by two main issues: the need to improve the low levels of quality offered in pre-school education, and the substantial differences between nurseries that fail to meet minimum levels of quality.

In sum, with a view to improving the educational attention currently received by children living in women's prisons, it would seem necessary to introduce a principle for working towards harmonizing the attention provided in different centres, but also the conditions in which this attention is offered (starting ages, nurseries outside the prison, etc.). In our view, this would imply, first, the improvement of the facilities and material resources in some nurseries, the educational supervision of the objectives and activities of all nurseries, and research on the

conditions in which these children should be integrated into pre-school education beyond the prison walls; and second, the involvement of nursery staff in training activities with a view to the continual renewal of interest and improvement of knowledge.

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