

Today's parents 'not to blame' for teenage problem behaviour

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Mobile phones and the internet create new challenges for today's parents. Image by Serenity via Wikimedia Commons.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Poor parenting is not the reason for an increase in problem behaviour amongst teenagers, according to research led by Oxford University.

A team led by Professor Frances Gardner from the Department of Social Policy and [Social Work](#) at the University of Oxford found no evidence of a general decline in parenting. Their findings show that differences in parenting according to family structure and income have narrowed over

the last 25 years. However, the task of parenting is changing and could be getting increasingly stressful, particularly for some groups.

[Parents](#) and teenagers are choosing to spend more quality time together than 25 years ago, with 70 per cent of [young people](#) regularly spending time with their mothers in 2006 compared to 62 per cent in 1986. For fathers, the figure had increased from 47 per cent to 52 per cent.

This research follows a Nuffield-funded study in 2004, which identified an increase in both [adolescent](#) conduct and emotional problems over the last 25 years.

Despite the rise, this latest study shows that today's parents are more likely to know where their teenage children are and what they are doing than their 1980s equivalents. The proportion asking what their children were doing has increased from 47 per cent in 1986 to 66 per cent in 2006.

Differences in the monitoring of teenage children, according to family type and income, have narrowed. For example in 1994, 14-15 year olds from single parent families were more likely to be out late without their parents knowing where compared with two parent families, but by 2005 this difference had disappeared.

Professor Gardner said: 'We found no evidence for declining standards of parenting overall, and this leads us to believe this factor does not generally explain the rise in problem behaviour.'

Parents of teenagers are increasingly likely to report symptoms of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#) themselves, particularly one-parent families and those on low incomes. For example, the proportion of parents from the most economically disadvantaged group who reported symptoms of depression and anxiety had increased by more than 50 per cent between

1986 and 2006.

The research highlights a different set of challenges for parents compared with 25 years ago. Young people now are reliant on their parents for longer, with higher proportions of 20-24 year olds living with their parents. Many more remain in some kind of education or training into their late teens. In addition, the development of new technology, such as mobile phones and the Internet, has created new monitoring challenges for parents.

'Today's parents have had to develop skills that are significantly different and arguably more complex than 25 years ago, and this could be increasing the stress involved in parenting,' Professor Gardner said.

The research, commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation for a briefing paper, Time trends in parenting and outcomes for young people, was authored by Dr Ann Hagell, Head of the Nuffield Foundation's Changing Adolescence Programme.

The research team reviewed published evidence, and analysed two sets of UK nationally representative data. The first was the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), with annual data on parenting reported by teenagers and their [parents](#) from 1994 onwards. The second data source comes from a related Nuffield-funded project, led by Dr Stephan Collishaw, to study causes of trends in youth mental health.

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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