

Why mothers who are 'happier in themselves' make more successful parents

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(PhysOrg.com) -- They say money can't buy you happiness -- but it seems that being 'happy in yourself' can make you a more successful mum, regardless of your financial circumstances, according to new research using the Children of the 90s cohort.

And the good news is that when [parents](#) find a way of improving their wellbeing their parenting improves, even when the amount of money they have available for the family doesn't change.

Scientists, working together from the University of Bristol and the University of Warwick, found that - while money is obviously of vital importance to families - it's not the key ingredient when it comes to successful parenting.

The team used data from the Bristol-based Children of the 90s study

who sent out questionnaires to over 11,300 parents living in the South-West when their children were aged eight months. They were contacted again, shortly before their children's third birthday (at 33 months old) when information was collected from 9,687 parents.

Lead researchers Professor Sarah Stewart-Brown and Dr Andrea Waylen used this data to explore which factors influence parenting in [early childhood](#). Parenting was measured by mother's report of enjoyment, confidence, pleasure, fulfilment with respect to caring for the child, dislike of the child's crying and surrounding mess, and lack of time for herself.

The research is now published in the journal *Child: care, health and development*.

Professor Sarah Stewart-Brown from Warwick University said, “We know from other research that if you look at two families with the same levels of income the mum who is ‘happier in herself’ will be the more successful parent.

“What our study did was to follow up those same families again. Results showed that those mums who became ‘happier in themselves’ compared to their own rating from two years earlier were also caring for their toddlers in ways which are more beneficial for children's wellbeing and development.

“What strengthens this finding is that we also found the converse; when mum's reported that their wellbeing had declined their parenting had also taken a turn for the worse.”

“When we looked at poverty we did not find that [parents](#) whose financial circumstances improved were parenting in a more beneficial way when their children were 33 months old.”

Dr Andrea Waylen, from the University of Bristol added, "Poverty is obviously a key issue that already attracts a great deal of research and a raft of policy interventions - and rightly so. However, there is much less concern for parent's mental health.

“Policies are needed to address both issues but our research suggests that the gain for children from policies to support parent's mental health is likely to be of more benefit to [children](#).”

More information: 'Factors influencing parenting in early childhood: a prospective longitudinal study focusing on change' by A. Waylen and S. Stewart-Brown *Child: care, health and development* Vol. 36 Issue 2, pages 198-202. www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0305-1862

Provided by University of Bristol

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