

Many new mothers spend more time on Facebook after giving birth

June 4 2012, by Jeff Grabmeier

A small, exploratory study suggests that many first-time parents - particularly mothers - actually increase the amount of time they spend on Facebook after the birth of their child.

Results showed that 44 percent of mothers said their [Facebook](#) use increased after [giving birth](#), compared to 27 percent who said it decreased and 29 percent who said it stayed the same.

For fathers, 31 percent said their Facebook use increased, while 19 percent said it decreased and 51 percent said it stayed the same.

The study, published in the July issue of the journal *Family Relations*, is the first to investigate new parents' use of Facebook during this stressful life event.

The results offer some initial clues as to how Facebook use may affect new parents' adjustment to [parenthood](#), according to the researchers.

The findings suggest that, despite all the new demands faced by new parents, spending time on Facebook was worthwhile to them, said Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan, co-author of the study and associate professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University.

"Given all the stress that new parents are under and everything they have to manage, it wouldn't have been surprising if we had found a decrease in Facebook usage - but that's not what we found," Schoppe-Sullivan

said.

Particularly for mothers, who may spend more time at home taking care of the baby, Facebook may be a way to connect with friends and family and seek support during a stressful time.

"These mothers may be taking time off from work, and may be far from family, so this network they created for themselves on Facebook can be very valuable in helping them cope," said Mitchell Bartholomew, lead author of the study and a [graduate student](#) in human development and family science at Ohio State.

This study is part of a larger, long-term "New Parents Project," co-led by Schoppe-Sullivan, that is studying how dual-earner couples adjust to becoming parents for the first time.

The study involved 154 mothers and 150 fathers, most of whom were white and highly educated. The data from this study came from questions asked nine months after the birth of their child.

New mothers reported both visiting their Facebook accounts more frequently than fathers, and also managing their content more often.

The majority of mothers (58 percent) visited their accounts at least once a day, compared to 44 percent of fathers.

Nearly all women (98 percent) said they had uploaded photos of their child to Facebook, while 83 percent of fathers said they did. Nearly two-thirds of mothers (63 percent) said they uploaded more photos after the birth of their child than they had before, as did 73 percent of fathers.

And 93 percent of mothers and 71 percent of fathers said it was "likely" or "very likely" that the photos would be acknowledged by their

Facebook friends, either with a comment or a "like."

That kind of feedback was important for new parents. Both mothers and fathers who said it was likely that their Facebook friends would comment on photos also reported higher levels of satisfaction in their parenting role.

"Parents may feel like they're getting positive feedback about their role as parents," Schoppe-Sullivan said. "These are all first-time parents, and they particularly need that."

The researchers noted that most of the "friends" that people have on Facebook aren't usually close friends. Still, new parents may enjoy support and feedback even from acquaintances.

"There may be something about getting feedback from someone who doesn't know you very well that may be particularly encouraging," Bartholomew said.

"They don't know you very well, they don't owe you the positive reinforcement that you may expect from close friends and family, but still they took the time to comment on your photo or post."

But, particularly for mothers, having close ties on Facebook are important, the study found. When mothers reported that a greater proportion of their Facebook friends were family members or relatives, they reported greater satisfaction with their parenting role.

Facebook use was not always associated with better adjustment. Mothers who were more frequent visitors to their Facebook accounts and who managed their accounts more frequently reported higher levels of parenting stress.

Schoppe-Sullivan cautioned that they can't tell from this data whether more Facebook use caused stress for mothers, or if mothers with higher levels of stress were more likely to use Facebook frequently.

"I think the most likely interpretation is that mothers who experience higher levels of stress are looking for social support on Facebook so they visit more often," she said.

"I know that I see a lot of Facebook posts from new mothers talking about how their child wouldn't sleep, or how their second child was harder than their first. Stressed-out mothers may be using Facebook to vent and to find help."

But she said it may be possible that some new [mothers](#) see Facebook as just another chore they have to do to communicate with [friends](#) and family.

Future studies by the researchers will look more in-depth at how new [parents](#) use Facebook and how it impacts their coping and adjustment.

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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