

Research reveals Germans born after the fall of the Berlin Wall suffered from bad parenting

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Children born in East Germany shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall suffered from poor parenting from "risk loving" mothers and were 40 per cent more likely to commit crimes as adults according to a new study.

Dr Arnaud Chevalier, from the Department of Economics at Royal Holloway, University of London, discovered that women who gave birth

in East Germany just after the end of the communist regime were on average younger, less educated, more likely to be single and less likely to be in work than the average woman at that time. The mothers were also much more likely to be risk takers.

Dr Chevalier, explains: "After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the birth rate in East Germany effectively halved. The change from communism to capitalism signified a period of intense economic uncertainty in the country, putting many people off having children. Those who were born at this time grew up markedly different from other generations.

"It appears the mothers of this group or 'cohort' of young people were much more likely to be [risk takers](#) and passed this onto their children, who themselves grew up more willing to take risks. The children on average did less well at school, and were more likely to commit crimes."

To look at the possible role that parenting may have had on the outcomes of these [young people](#) Dr Chevalier and his colleagues studied the German Socio-Economic Panel, a longitudinal survey conducted in Germany where, at the age of 17, children are asked to rate the quality of parental support that they received when growing up. The children who were born between 1991 and 1993 in the Eastern states of the newly re-unified Germany rated their parents much less favourably than children who were born in previous years. Sunday 9 November marks 25 years since the fall of the wall that cut off West Berlin from surrounding East Germany and East Berlin.

"We believe that the unique nature of this generation in Germany can be explained by the lower than average [parenting skills](#) of those who decided to have children during a period of high [economic uncertainty](#)," says Dr Chevalier.

To make sure that it was the quality of parenting, and not aspects of the environment and time that they grew up in that were responsible for the generation's behaviour, the researchers looked at the older siblings of the 'children of the wall'. These siblings also reported having a poor relationship with their mother, and were also much more willing to take risks.

"The economic circumstances of the country at that time clearly affected the type of people who chose to become parents. Clearly those who were risk averse decided not to have [children](#), meaning a disproportionately large amount were born to risk loving parents. As these parents also tended to be younger and less educated, they may have lacked the parenting skills of older or more educated adults," added Dr Chevalier.

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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