

Does home comfort promote complacency?

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Developmental psychologists Dr. Maria Pavlova and Prof. Dr. Rainer Silbereisen (University of Jena) and their colleagues from Finland base their conclusions on a survey of more than 1,500 secondary school students. Credit: Anne Guenther/FSU

Working as a volunteer in crisis regions or in social projects, petitioning, and taking part in political debates and demonstrations -

there are a lot of opportunities for civic engagement. "Such activities are important for any democracy to function, although the specific content of civic engagement may differ across societies," says Dr. Maria K. Pavlova, a developmental psychologist from the University of Jena. For instance, she explains, private efforts to help the needy are much more common in the US than in the continental Europe, where the state takes over. "However, many factors that are known to foster civic engagement, such as high educational attainment, appear to be pretty universal."

Above all, parental warmth and support as a part of "authoritative parenting" make youth more caring, more trusting, and more socially responsible. And this, as has previously been assumed, makes youth also more likely to get civically engaged later on. However, the opposite is the case, as Dr. Maria K. Pavlova together with her colleagues, Prof. Dr. Rainer K. Silbereisen (Jena), Dr. Mette Ranta, and Prof. Dr. Katariina Salmela-Aro (Jyväskylä and Helsinki), have now found out. In their just-published article, the researchers showed that parental warmth and support experienced in adolescence predicted significantly lower political activism up to 10 years later. Additionally, perceived parental support in young adulthood predicted lower volunteering 2 years later.

The researchers base their conclusions on a survey of more than 1,500 Finnish secondary school students (aged 16-18 years at the beginning of the survey and 25-27 years at its end). "Similar effects have also emerged in a German sample, though," says Maria Pavlova. This shows that the current findings from Finland may be generalized to other countries.

The researchers suspect that it is a combination of factors that might explain these effects. "On the one hand, Finnish parents see civic engagement neither as something important to labor market success nor as morally obligatory as the state provides many social services in Finland," explains Maria Pavlova. "On the other hand, high [parental](#)

[support](#) in adolescence and young adulthood may be no longer age-appropriate. A pitfall of staying close to one's parents in [young adulthood](#) may be not caring for the world outside of one's own circle."

Although the negative effects of supportive parenting on [civic engagement](#) should not be overstated, conclude the researchers, their findings expose one problem: Good parenting alone, without an explicit endorsement of civic values in the family, is probably not enough to raise good citizens.

More information: Maria K. Pavlova et al, Warm and Supportive Parenting Can Discourage Offspring's Civic Engagement in the Transition to Adulthood, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-016-0511-5](#)

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