

Mum's the word when it comes to children's happiness

3 April 2011

As part of the study, which will follow 40,000 UK households over a number of years, young people aged between 10 to 15 years have been asked how satisfied they are with their lives. The findings indicate that a mother's happiness in her partnership is more important to the child than the father's. The findings are based on a sample of 6,441 women, 5,384 men and 1,268 young people.

Overall, 60 per cent of young people say they are 'completely satisfied' with their family situation but in families where the child's mother is unhappy in her [partnership](#), only 55 per cent of young people say they are 'completely happy' with their family situation - compared with 73 per cent of young people whose mothers are 'perfectly happy' in their relationships.

The Understanding Society research examined the relationships between married or cohabiting partners, and relationships between parents and their [children](#). Professor John Ermisch, Dr Maria Iacovou, and Dr Alexandra Skew from the Institute for Social and Economic Research found that the happiest children are those living with two parents - either biological or step - with no younger siblings, who do not quarrel with their parents regularly, who eat at least three evening meals per week with their family and whose mother is happy in her own relationship.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Maria Iacovou said: "At a time when there is widespread political concern about 'Broken Britain', these findings show that family relationships and the [happiness](#) of parents are key to the happiness of young people. Contrary to the popular belief that children only want to spend time playing videogames or watching TV we found that they were most happy when interacting with their parents or siblings."

The research also finds that having older siblings is not related to children's happiness with their family,

but having younger siblings in the household is associated with lower levels of satisfaction, and this effect is greater the more younger siblings there are in the household. But relationships with parents are even more important than relationships with siblings. Only 28 per cent of children who quarrel more than once a week with their parents, and don't discuss important matters with their [parents](#) are completely happy with their families.

Dr Iacovou commented: "Together these findings reveal the complex influences of different [family](#) relationships on a child's happiness. Over the years, as Understanding Society follows the lives of families in the UK, we'll build up an even better picture of how children's lives are affected by all kinds of factors. Understanding Society is really set to become a fantastic resource for anyone interested in the well-being of children"

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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