

Employment has a positive effect on maternal well-being, but women with very young children may need more support ^[1]

Author: Leek, S.

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Excerpts

The number of working mothers in Germany has been rising for years, and they find themselves constantly balancing between work and family. Research shows that being employed has a positive effect on a person's health and well-being.

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One mother, many roles

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"In our study, we looked at how mothers' well-being and health changed as they transitioned into the workforce. We compared single mothers with mothers living in a partnership," explains Mine Kühn.

The study analyzed the period between 1992 and 2016 throughout Germany using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).

Positive effect strongest among single mothers

The study shows that both single mothers and mothers with partners benefit from employment. Both groups show improvements in well-being and health. However, the positive effect on well-being and health is significantly greater for single mothers than for cohabiting mothers.

"Since single mothers are often under great financial pressure, which is also reflected in our data, one might assume that the increase in household income with increasing employment is the main reason for higher well-being and better health. However, our results show that income alone is not the reason. We hypothesize that a greater sense of financial independence from ex-partners or the state and additional social ties promote mothers' well-being. Gainful employment thus strengthens social identity and self-esteem," says Kühn.

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High stress for mothers with young children

The burden on mothers with at least one child under the age of five is very high in both groups. Women whose youngest child is in this age group have great difficulty in balancing everyday life, family and work. In fact, taking a job leads to a deterioration in well-being and health for both groups.

"Gainful employment is important for both single women and mothers in couple households. There are positive effects on well-being and health for both groups. Single mothers benefit even more because of their particular situation—and not only in terms of income. Overall, however, there is still much to be done in Germany to ensure that mothers with very young children are not burdened by employment. Further supportive policy measures are urgently needed, such as improving reliable, high-quality all-day childcare, especially for very young children," says Kühn.

The research is published in the journal Social Science Research.

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