

Working mom's kids turn out fine, 50 years of research says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Another day, another study on whether women who work are jeopardizing their children's well-being. According to a review of 50 years of research on the subject, kids whose moms went back to work before the kids were 3 years old had no worse academic or behavioral problems than kids whose moms stayed home. In fact, in some instances they did better. The research, which appears in the *Psychological Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed publication of the American Psychological Association, looked at 69 studies between 1960, when research on the issue started, and 2010. The researchers looked specifically at academic and behavioral outcomes. "We really wanted to try to resolve some of the controversy and inconsistent findings around the issue of maternal employment," says lead author Rachel Lucas Thompson, an assistant professor of psychology at Macalester College in Minnesota. (More on Time.com: See photos of the Grosse Pointe Moms Club)

The researchers found little evidence to suggest that mothers who work part-time or full-time have children with problems in later life. But the researchers did find two positive associations between working motherhood and well-adjusted children: kids whose mothers worked when they were younger than 3 were later rated as higher-achieving by teachers and had fewer problems with depression and anxiety.

The only small caveat was that children whose mothers worked in the very first year of their lives tended to have slightly lower formal academic scores than those whose moms didn't. However children whose mothers were employed when the child was 1 or 2 years old had higher academic scores than kids with full-time moms. Over the three years, the effects evened out. (More on Time.com: "Mompertition": Why You Just Can't Make Mom Friends).

The debate about working moms is often conducted as if the only group affected were guilt-ridden high-income college-educated women. But most working mothers have little choice but to hold down a paying job, especially in single-parent families. The children of single moms who work tend to do better than those who don't. "These findings suggest in single-parent families there should be no guilt about employment," says Lucas-Thompson. "They can also alleviate some concerns among the wealthy," although among children of higher-income families whose moms were working before they were 3, there was a slightly higher incidence of aggressive behavior.

It's not just the extra money the working mothers bring in that helps the kids, although that's a huge part of it. Other research has suggested that an employed mother provides children with a positive role model about the value of working hard, and lessens other, non-economic stresses on the family. (More on Time.com: 5 Pregnancy Taboos Explained (or Debunked)).

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