

Working moms feel better than stay-at-home moms, study finds

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Mothers with jobs tend to be healthier and happier than moms who stay at home during their children's infancy and pre-school years, according to a new study published by the American Psychological Association.

Researchers analyzed National Institute for [Child Health](#) and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development data, beginning in 1991 with interviews of 1,364 mothers shortly after their child's birth and including subsequent interviews and observations spanning more than 10 years. The findings were published in the December issue of APA's *Journal of [Family Psychology](#)*.

"In all cases with significant differences in maternal well-being, such as conflict between work and family or parenting, the comparison favored part-time work over full-time or not working," said lead author Cheryl Buehler, PhD, professor of human development and family studies, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "However, in many cases the well-being of moms working part time was no different from moms working full time."

For example, mothers employed part time reported better overall health and fewer [symptoms of depression](#) than stay-at-home moms, while there were no reported differences in [general health](#) or [depressive symptoms](#) between moms employed part time and those who worked full time, the study said.

The part-time and full-time working moms also showed no significant

differences when it came to the women's [perception](#) that their employment supported family life, including their ability to be a better parent, the authors wrote.

The analysis found that mothers employed part time were just as involved in their child's school as stay-at-home moms, and more involved than moms who worked full time. In addition, mothers working part time appeared more sensitive with their pre-school children and they provided more learning opportunities for [toddlers](#) than stay-at-home moms and moms working full time.

Particularly in tough economic times, employers looking for cost savings hire part-time employees because they typically do not receive the same level of benefits, such as health insurance, training and career advancement, the authors pointed out.

"Since part-time work seems to contribute to the strength and well-being of families, it would be beneficial to employers if they provide fringe benefits, at least proportionally, to part-time employees as well as offer them career ladders through training and promotion," said study co-author Marion O'Brien, PhD, professor of human development and family studies, also of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Mothers who participated in the study were from 10 locations across the U.S., and included 24 percent ethnic minorities, 1 percent without a high school degree, and 14 percent single parents. The number of mothers employed part time was fairly consistent at about 25 percent of the total over the span of the study, although mothers moved in and out of part-time work. Part-time employment was defined as between one and 32 hours per week.

The study's limitations included the fact that only one child in the family was included and its exclusive focus on work hours, according to the

authors. They recommended that future research include other employment-related factors such as professional status, scheduling flexibility, work commitment and shift schedules.

More information: "Mothers' Part-Time Employment: Associations With Mother and Family Well-Being," Cheryl Buehler, PhD, and Marion O'Brien, PhD, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 25, Issue 6.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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