

Mothers of kids with autism earn less, study shows

March 19 2012, By Kathleen Doheny, HealthDay Reporter



Moms may need to devote time to caring for the child, researchers say.

(HealthDay) -- Mothers of children with autism and autism spectrum disorders earn significantly less than what mothers of children who have no health limitations earn, a new study has found.

These moms even earn less than [mothers](#) of children with other health limitations.

Mothers of children with autism earned, on average, less than \$21,000 a year, the researchers found. That was 56 percent less than mothers whose children had no health limitations and 35 percent less than mothers whose children had other health limitations.

In addition, moms who have children with autism are 6 percent less

likely to be employed, and work an average of seven hours less per week than mothers of children with no health limitations, the study found.

While the researchers did not find differences in fathers' incomes, the overall income in families that have children with autism suffers, said lead researcher David Mandell, associate director of the Center for [Autism Research](#) at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and associate director of the Center for [Mental Health Policy](#) and Services Research at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.

"Families of children with autism experience a 28 percent reduction in income compared to families with typically developing children," he said. The family incomes of parents whose children have autism is also less, 21 percent, than those whose children have other health limitations, Mandell found.

The study is published online March 19 and in the April print issue of *Pediatrics*.

For the study, Mandell and his colleagues looked at data from the 2002-2008 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. This ongoing survey of U.S. [households](#) collects detailed information on [medical conditions](#), [health services](#) use and expenditure, and other data.

The researchers looked at 261 children with autism spectrum disorders, nearly 3,000 with other health limitations and more than 64,000 with no health limitations.

About 67 percent of the children with autism had mothers who worked outside the home. About 92 percent of the kids with autism had working fathers.

[Autism spectrum disorders](#) now affect about one in 110 children in the

United States. The spectrum includes a range of neurodevelopmental disorders, all marked by difficulties in social and communication skills and repetitive behaviors.

A mother may cut back work hours or drop out of the workforce to help supervise their child's care, including advocating for services, according to the researchers.

The costs of caring for [children](#) with other disabilities is about 5 percent to 12 percent of family income, the researchers noted, citing other research.

The researchers didn't have information on how severe the autism was in each case, so Mandell couldn't say if costs are more or go up if the autism is more severe.

The findings don't surprise Dr. Andrew Adesman, chief of developmental and behavioral [pediatrics](#) at the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York.

"Basically, autism is taking a double toll," he said. Besides the increased costs for health care and other services, the reduced earnings also have an impact, Adesman pointed out.

Parents can and should reach out for help, the experts stressed.

"Take advantage of services available," Adesman said.

For example, Mandell noted, a parent group in Philadelphia will send someone knowledgeable to go with a parent of a child with autism to the school meeting to develop the educational plan.

Peter Bell, executive vice president for services and programs for

Autism Speaks, an advocacy group, said the task of caring for a child with autism can be daunting.

"The study isn't surprising for families who live with autism every day," he said. "When their child is diagnosed with [autism](#), it is a game changer."

More information: To learn more about autism spectrum disorders, visit the www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html "target="_new">U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Citation: Mothers of kids with autism earn less, study shows (2012, March 19) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-mothers-kids-autism.html>

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