

US, Great Britain share risk factors for child behavior problems

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New research from North Carolina State University shows that the United States and Great Britain share common risk factors that increase the likelihood of behavioral problems in children – and that Britain's broader social welfare programs don't appear to mitigate those risks.

The researchers – from NC State, California State University Northridge and the University of Illinois (UI) – evaluated data from a 1994 study of [children](#) between the ages of five and 13 in the U.S. and a 1991 study of children in the same age range from England, Scotland and Wales.

In both societies, researchers found that male children, children with health problems and children with divorced mothers were more likely to have behavioral problems.

"We also found that stronger home environments – those that are intellectually stimulating, nurturing and physically safe – decrease the likelihood of behavior problems in both countries," says Dr. Toby Parcel, a professor of sociology at NC State and lead author of a paper describing the work.

"We wanted to see whether the role of parents was equally important in both societies," Parcel says, "because the argument has been made that more developed welfare states – such as [Great Britain](#) – can make the role of parents less important, by providing additional supports that can help compensate for situations where households have more limited resources.

"This study tells us that parents are important in households, regardless of the strength of the welfare state."

While the risk factors are common between the two countries, there are some differences. For example, "family structure" effects were more pronounced in Great Britain. Family structure, in this context, refers to marital status and family size. British families with a single mother or multiple children are at higher risk of having a child with behavior problems – the more children in the family, the greater the risk.

The paper, "Children's [Behavior Problems](#) in the [United States](#) and Great Britain," is published online in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* and was co-authored by Dr. Lori Ann Campbell of Cal State Northridge and Dr. Wenxuan Zhong of UI. The research was funded, in part, by the National Science Foundation.

The researchers are now looking to see how shared [risk factors](#) may influence child cognition and academic achievement across these two societies. Parcel and Campbell have previously shown that parents are critical to the creation of strong home environments in both the U.S. and Great Britain.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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