

Parents are happier than non-parents, new research suggests

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New research by psychologists at three North American universities, including the University of British Columbia, finds that parents experience greater levels of happiness and meaning from life than non-parents.

The findings, which contrast sharply with recent scholarship and popular beliefs, suggest that [parents](#) are happier caring for children than they are during other daily activities. The research also suggests that the benefits of parenthood appear more consistently in men and older and married parents.

To be published in the journal [Psychological Science](#), the findings are among a new wave of research that suggests that parenthood comes with relatively more positives than negatives, despite the added responsibilities. The research also dovetails with emerging evolutionary perspectives that suggest parenting may be a fundamental human need.

"This series of studies suggest that parents are not nearly the 'miserable creatures' we might expect from recent studies and popular representations," says UBC Psychology Prof. Elizabeth Dunn, who co-authored the study with colleagues at the University of California, Riverside and Stanford University. "If you went to a large dinner party, our findings suggest that the parents in the room would be as happy or happier than those guests without children."

Over three studies, the researchers tested whether parents are happier

overall than their childless [peers](#), if parents feel better moment-to-moment than non-parents, and whether parents experience more [positive feelings](#) when taking care of children than during their other daily activities. The consistency of their findings, based on data and participants in both the U.S. and Canada, provides strong evidence challenging the notion that children are associated with reduced well-being, the researchers say.

The study identifies age and [marital status](#) as factors in parental [happiness](#). "We find that if you are older (and presumably more mature) and if you are married (and presumably have more social and financial support), then you're likely to be happier if you have children than your childless peers," says co-author Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor of psychology at UC Riverside. "This is not true, however, for single parents or very young parents."

Fathers in particular expressed greater levels of happiness, positive emotion and meaning in life than their childless peers. "Interestingly, the greater levels of parental happiness emerged more consistently in fathers than mothers," says Dunn. "While more research is needed on this topic, it suggests that the pleasures of parenthood may be offset by the surge in responsibility and housework that arrives with motherhood," she says.

The researchers also found that the stresses associated with single parenthood did not wipe out the greater feelings of meaning and reward associated with having children.

"We are not saying that parenting makes people happy, but that parenthood is associated with happiness and meaning," Lyubomirsky says. "Contrary to repeated scholarly and media pronouncements, people may find solace that [parenthood](#) and child care may actually be linked to feelings of happiness and meaning in life."

Provided by University of British Columbia

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