

Women with less education than their mothers risk poor mental health

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(Medical Xpress)—Women with significantly lower levels of education than their parents are at higher risk of poor mental health, a new University of Queensland study has found.

UQ School of [Population Health](#) researchers, Dr Leigh Tooth and Professor Gita Mishra found the greater difference between parents, in particular a mother's education and her daughter's, the more chance the daughter will experience depression and other [mental health disorders](#).

The researchers studied 5,619 women from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health, aged 31–36 years, measuring [depressive symptoms](#) against the educational mobility – or differences – between women and their parents.

Dr Tooth said the study revealed, in comparison, daughters with an equivalent or higher level of education to their parents had better mental health.

"There was also an association between a father having a higher [educational status](#) than his daughter, and her risk of poor mental health, however the mother-daughter association was stronger," Dr Tooth said.

She said a number of reasons could possibly explain the links.

"Prior research has found that a mother's education may have more impact on the outcomes of her children because she tends to be the

primary [caregiver](#) in the pre-school years," she said.

"The more highly educated a mother is, the more likely she is to spend direct time with her children and provide them with an academically and educationally enriching care environment.

"Instances where daughters have poor mental health and highly educated mothers may possibly reflect pre-existing [mental health issues](#) preventing the daughter from achieving academically.

"It may also reflect the underlying parent-daughter relationship, with previous research showing that the quality of same-sex relationships (i.e. mother–daughter, father–son) to have more influence on mental health outcomes in the offspring than the quality of different sex relationships."

Researchers also found a surprisingly high percentage of women did not know both parents' education levels.

"This could be because of family dysfunction or break-up, lots of moving or job changes, or illness," Dr Tooth said.

"It would be interesting to investigate this issue more deeply."

Researchers hope study findings may help health practitioners to better tailor health messages and interventions when working with women at risk of [poor mental health](#).

This study has been published in the journal *Quality of Life* and can be found at link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11136-012-0310-8

Provided by University of Queensland

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