

# Pain of poverty sticks, despite support of neighbors or spouses

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Being married or having the support of neighbors to rely on does little to alleviate the symptoms of depression associated with economic hardship often experienced by poor mothers. With these findings, published in Springer's *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Sharon Kingston of Dickinson College in the US challenges the growing perception that marriage and other forms of interpersonal support can buffer the negative effects of poverty.

In studying 1,957 mothers from 80 [neighborhoods](#) in Chicago, Kingston examined the combined effect of economic adversity and having interpersonal resources such as the support of [family](#) and friends, a

spouse and a socially unified neighborhood to rely on. Participants were all part of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.

Kingston used household income, financial strain and the poverty levels of participants' neighborhoods as measures of economic adversity. Financial strain measures the inability to afford necessities. Being unable to successfully provide needed resources to their children can be stressful to mothers. Likewise, the socio-economic status of a neighborhood can also be acutely stressful to them because of high levels of crime and poor quality recreation, school and childcare options.

She found that these all added to increased depressive symptoms among mothers. Not surprisingly, women with minor children who reported lower household incomes, higher levels of financial strain and who lived in low socio-economic neighborhoods reported more depressive symptoms than more affluent mothers. Being married was associated with fewer depressive symptoms than being single. However, marital status did little to alleviate [symptoms of depression](#) felt by [mothers](#) of poorer families.

Interestingly, Kingston found that even though women who received support from friends and family had fewer [depressive symptoms](#), such relationships did not counter the effects of family income and financial strain.

"Risks related to economic adversity will in all likelihood not be mitigated by efforts to bolster interpersonal support such as marriage support programs targeted to low-income parents," concludes Kingston. "Interventions that directly target economic conditions at the family or neighborhood level may be more likely to have positive effects on a mother's well-being."

**More information:** Kingston, S. (2013). Economic Adversity and Depressive Symptoms in Mothers: Do Marital Status and Perceived Social Support Matter? *American Journal of Community Psychology*, DOI: [10.1007/s10464-013-9601-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9601-7)

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