

Single motherhood does not make women unhappy

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Credit: Marty from Manitou Springs, USA. Via Wikipedia.

(Medical Xpress)—Raising a child outside of marriage poses many challenges – but does not have a negative impact on women's happiness, according to new research published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Single motherhood is often seen as a reason for a number of life

adversities. Single mothers need to handle organizational and financial pressures. They also suffer from a lack of partner support, and social disapproval of bearing and rearing on their own. In this new study researchers from Umeå University, Wittgenstein Centre in Austria, Warsaw School of Economics and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Poland, shows that it is not the arrival of a child per se that leads to a decline in [single mothers'](#) happiness.

"Despite all of the difficulties and problems— or maybe because of them— the children are moved to the absolute center of the woman's universe and they are the brightest aspect of their lives, " says Monika Mynarska, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

"Moreover, children often give women the power to make decisions they had not been able to make before pregnancy."

Specifically, being responsible for the child's well-being helped many of the interviewed women escape unhappy or pathological relationships, and made them more cautious and demanding when getting involved with a new partner. Hence, becoming a mother might move a woman's life onto a "better track".

These findings, stemming from in-depth interviews, are further supported by the analyses of nationally representative survey in Poland, which show that the positive aspects of lone motherhood counterbalanced the negative ones.

"An arrival of a child either had no impact or even increases the happiness of the single mothers" says Anna Baranowska-Rataj, Umeå University.

The study combines insights from both in-depth interviews with mothers who gave birth while single and a large-scale panel survey that follows individuals over time for over a decade. This combination of methods

allowed for exploring the possible mechanisms through which motherhood may raise or reduce happiness and – in a second step – to quantify these influences and see whether they really have impact in the whole population of single mothers.

The study is conducted in Poland, a country where the degree of acceptance of nonmarital childbearing is still relatively low and the welfare state support for lone mothers is very limited. Given these unfavorable conditions, one could expect strong negative effects of having a child on the [happiness](#) of women who have no partners.

"All in all, we found no evidence to support the assumption that the lives of women who became single [mothers](#) would have turned out better if they had not given birth and had not decided to raise on their own", concludes Anna Matysiak, Wittgenstein Centre.

More information: Does Lone Motherhood Decrease Women's Happiness? Evidence from Qualitative and Quantitative Research, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-013-9486-z

Provided by Umea University

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