

Why me? Many women living in poverty blame children, love life

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Having had children – particularly early in life – and a dysfunctional romantic relationship are the two most frequently cited reasons when low-income mothers are asked about why they find themselves in poverty. So say American researchers Kristin Mickelson of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Arizona State University, and Emily Hazlett of Kent State University and the Northeast Ohio Medical University, in a new article published in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*. The researchers believe that how a woman answers the question of "why me?" when thinking about her own impoverished state influences her mental health. Such answers can also provide clues to whether the woman believes she will ever rise out of poverty.

The research done by Mickelson and Hazlett forms part of the larger "Mother's Outcome Matters" study in Northeast Ohio. They analyzed a set of close-ended questions that were put to a community sample of 66 low-income mothers.

The researchers found that women who attributed their [poverty](#) to having had children tended to suffer greater levels of depression, possibly because they feel some sense of guilt, blame or helplessness. Women who attributed their poverty to problems in their [romantic relationships](#) experienced more anxiety. This might reflect their sense of fear, or lack of control over issues such as [domestic violence](#), the poor spending habits of their partners, or because they do not receive child support. Women who "shook their fists" at the government, or blamed discriminatory practices such as unequal pay to women, suffered both

greater depression and anxiety. Only a few blamed fate for their situation.

Most women perceived their current social class to be significantly lower than it was when they themselves were children. They were, however, quite optimistic that they would be able to enjoy middle class living in the not too distant future. This was especially true for women who blamed their poverty on becoming mothers, or the state of their romantic relationships. This might be because they believe they can rise out of poverty once the reasons behind it are removed, for instance when their children leave home, or when they are able to escape a bad relationship.

Therefore, Mickelson and Hazlett suggest that women who blame their motherhood or romantic relationships for their state of poverty will be the ones that benefit most from current [mental health](#) programs aimed at domestic violence victims and childcare issues.

"By understanding how women answer the question of who or what is to blame for their current financial situation, we can begin to develop more effective interventions and policies," says Mickelson.

"We are better able to understand whether such women will tend to suffer depression or anxiety, and how they think about their chances of being able to rise above their current social class and situations," adds Hazlett.

More information: *Sex Roles* [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-014-0414-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0414-4)

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