

Association between parental time pressure and mental health problems among children

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A doctor's thesis at Sahlgrenska Academy has found that children whose parents experience time pressure are more likely to have mental health problems.

Mental [health problems](#) among children and adolescents are a growing health challenge in the Nordic countries. Children's sense of wellbeing largely reflects the circumstances in which their [parents](#) find themselves.

But few scientific studies have addressed the subject head-on.

In-depth interviews

A doctoral thesis by Hrafnhildur Gunnarsdottir has examined the association between children's [mental health](#) and the time pressure and [financial stress](#) that their parents experience.

The data were collected by means of questionnaires completed by 7,805 parents of randomly selected 2-17 year-olds in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as well as in-depth interviews with 25 parents of 3-5 year-olds. The children's mental health was rated by means of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

Demands and expectations

The interviewees generally characterized their lives in terms of demands,

expectations and time pressure. Approximately 14% of mothers and 12% of fathers said that they usually had trouble getting everything done in the course of a day. The children of those particular parents were more likely to have [mental health problems](#).

"Parents' experienced time pressure appears to be associated with the mental health of both girls and boys," Ms. Gunnarsdottir says. "Children of parents who experienced time pressure were approximately twice as likely to have [psychological problems](#)."

Financial stress

Icelandic parents were most prone to report financial stress, a natural outcome of the extent to which their communities have been affected by the 2008 global financial crisis. Nevertheless, mental health problems among Icelandic children were not as closely associated with the financial stress of their parents as in other Nordic countries.

"One reason may be that children accept the situation with a greater sense of equanimity when most everyone around them is encountering the same difficulties," Ms. Gunnarsdottir says. "The majority of households in other Nordic countries enjoy solid finances, which makes the rest more emotionally vulnerable. Still it is important to emphasize that Icelandic children have similar levels of mental health problems as their counterparts in the other countries even though the financial stress of their parents does not play as great a role".

First study of its kind

"Modern society attaches great importance to material possessions, including consumption and performance. Our results suggest that the widespread mental health problems found among Nordic children

despite the fact that they would appear to be in a relatively strong position to enjoy health and wellbeing stems partly from cultural and social structures. But additional research is needed to confirm that hypothesis. Our studies were the very first to explore the association between the time pressure experienced by parents and the mental health of their children."

The studies were conducted in collaboration with the Nordic School of Public Health as part of the NordChild research project on child and adolescent health and wellbeing.

FACTS FROM THE THESIS

Proportion of parents who experience time pressure—women vs. men:

Sweden: 22% vs. 18%

Finland: 18% vs. 18%

Norway: 14% vs. 9%

Denmark: 4% vs. 2%

Mental health problems among children whose parents experience [time pressure](#):

Girls: 2.0 times higher odds compared to other girls

Boys: 1.8 times higher odds compared to other boys

Number of parents reporting financial stress:

Iceland 48%

Finland: 34%

Sweden: 20%

Norway: 19%

Denmark: 18%

Mental health problems among children of parents with financial stress as opposed to other [children](#):

Iceland 1.3 times higher odds
Finland: 2.1 times higher odds
Sweden: 2.5 times higher odds
Norway: 2.2 times higher odds
Denmark: 2.6 times higher odds

The thesis 'Parental Time Pressure and Financial Stress—Challenges for Mental Health of Nordic Children and Adolescents' was defended on December 19.

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