

Study shows how dominant parents affect kids' self-worth

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Children's self-esteem is linked to the behaviour of who is considered the most powerful parent within the household, new University of Sussex research suggests.

The study of English and Indian families living in Britain is the first to assess the impact on a child's wellbeing of the household power structures that exist within different cultures.

Psychologists interviewed 125 English and Indian families living in West London.

They found that English children whose [mothers](#) displayed more negative parenting traits - such as detachment, intrusiveness, lax enforcement of discipline, and controlling behaviour - reported lower self-esteem. But, for Indian children, the father's behaviour had more of an impact.

In Indian culture, as often characterises more traditional cultures, mothers have inferior positions to [fathers](#), both within and outside the household. Fathers are considered to be the head of the family, in terms of power and their role as disciplinarian. These differences often remain in spite of immigration into Britain.

In contrast, in Western cultures, although still somewhat patriarchal, mothers have more central roles than fathers within the home and are often responsible for routine care and discipline.

Dr Alison Pike, Reader in Psychology at the University of Sussex, co-authored the study. She said: "Mothers and fathers play different roles in different [cultures](#) - these findings highlight the importance of these distinct gender-based power structures on a child's self-worth.

"Parenting literature is still dominated by mothering, reflecting Western norms. With 7.5 million foreign-born residents in the UK, we need to spend more time considering parenting practice through a cultural lens."

The study, carried out in collaboration with Dr Naama Atzaba-Poria

from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, is published in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*.

More information: *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*,
jcc.sagepub.com/content/46/5/702

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