

# Being mom's favorite may not be good for your psychological health

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

Being mom's favorite child is not a guarantee that it is best for one's psychological health, according to new research from Purdue University.

"There is a cost for those who perceive they are the closest emotionally to their [mothers](#), and these children report higher depressive symptoms,

as do those who experience the greatest conflict with their mothers or who believe they are the children in whom their mothers are the most disappointed," said Jill Sutor, a professor of sociology.

The findings are published in the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, and are based on the first and second phases of the Within-Family Differences Study. Data for the study were collected seven years apart from 725 [adult children](#) within 309 families in which mothers were 65-75 when the project began in 2001. The four dimensions of favoritism and disfavoritism are emotional closeness, conflict, pride and disappointment.

"This cost comes from higher sibling tension experienced by adult children who are favored for [emotional closeness](#), or the greater feelings of responsibility for the emotional care of their [older mothers](#)," said Megan Gilligan, an assistant professor in [human development](#) and family studies at Iowa State University and a former Purdue graduate student. She is a collaborator on the project.

The study is funded by the National Institute on Aging and co-authored with Karl Pillemer, professor of human development in the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University.

The researchers also compared the patterns by race because much research shows there is greater closeness in black later-life families. In this study, approximately one-quarter of the families were black.

"What we found suggests that the black offspring were particularly distressed when they, as opposed to their siblings, were the [children](#) in whom mothers were most disappointed," said Sutor, who also is a member of the Center on Aging and the Life Course.

The research team also is looking at similar questions related to fathers

and predicting favoritism in mother-adult child favoritism. Siyun Peng and Jong Hyun Jung, graduate students in Purdue's Department of Sociology, also participated on this research team.

**More information:** J. Jill Sutor et al. Role of Perceived Maternal Favoritism and Disfavoritism in Adult Children's Psychological Well-Being, *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* (2015). [DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbv089](https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbv089)

Provided by Purdue University

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