

Parental stress and child behavior health impacts

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Parenting a child with an illness or physical disability can be stressful, but a child's behavior can also affect the physical and mental well-being of parents in low-income and racially diverse families, according to Penn

State research.

Rhonda BeLue, associate professor of health policy and administration, looked at the relationships of [child](#) conduct, health, and [parental stress](#) in her paper published recently in PubMed Central, the US National Institutes of Health free digital archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature.

"When dealing with family health issues, often the focus is on the child. I wanted to look at how parental health is impacted when raising a child with health and [behavior problems](#)," BeLue explained. "The interactive effects of child health and behavior problems and parental [stress](#) among low-income, ethnically-diverse [mothers](#) has not been thoroughly explored."

According to BeLue, managing [parenting stress](#) plays an important role in the well-being of low-income and minority mothers and children across multiple stages of child development.

"Parenting stress has been linked to harsh parenting, maternal depression, and poor cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development in children and may have long lasting effects on the well-being of parents and children."

BeLue and her research team looked at a sample of 177 low-income black, Latino, and white mothers of kindergartners with behavior problems who were participating in a larger Penn State study called PATHS to Success directed by Mark Greenberg, professor of human development and psychology and founding director of the Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Penn State. The PATHS project is collaborating with the Harrisburg School District to develop new programs for K-3 children and their families.

Baseline assessments were collected in the fall of the children's kindergarten year at school, where teachers rated children's behavior. Additionally, trained interviewers went to the homes of participants and asked questions about the mother's health, approach to childrearing, family circumstances, and the kinds of behavior their children displayed at home.

The research team found that low-income mothers who are racially diverse and parenting children with health and behavior problems are particularly vulnerable to poor physical and mental health. "We found that Latino mothers experienced the highest rate of [mental health problems](#)," said BeLue.

They also found older mothers reported more parenting hassles due to child behavior problems compared to younger mothers, while mothers who worked reported better mental health but higher parenting stress compared to non-working mothers. In addition, mothers who had less than a high school education experienced more parenting hassles, mental stress and health problems compared to mothers with more education.

The team found that regardless of race, age, education level or employment statuses, child conduct-caused parenting hassles were a key factor associated with parenting stress. Social support helped to buffer the relationship between parenting hassles and stress, while poor health caused it to worsen. "Health disparities exist among low income, racially diverse families, but [health](#) is also dependent familial relationships," noted BeLue. "It is critical that family practitioners provide parenting resources and social support to these mothers."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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