

Hostile sexism linked to less responsive parenting

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Fathers and mothers who believe that men should hold the power and authority in the family exhibit less responsive parenting behavior, according to a new article in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. This research provides the first behavioral evidence demonstrating that hostile sexism is linked to less responsive parenting by both fathers and

mothers.

Hostile sexism is characterized by beliefs that men should hold power and authority in society. Its [harmful effects](#) are well-established, especially in predicting harmful behavior toward women. However, this new research highlights its impact on parenting attitudes and behaviors.

"Gender inequality and child well-being are ongoing global challenges, and sexist beliefs about the kinds of roles that are appropriate for men and women contribute to gender inequalities," says lead author Nickola Overall, of the University of Auckland. "The current results emphasize that the harmful effects of sexist attitudes also involves poorer parenting, which has important long-term consequences for children's well-being and development."

In a study with 95 families, fathers with higher levels of hostile sexism self-reported less warm and more controlling parenting attitudes. Importantly, when observing fathers and mothers during family interactions with their [five-year-old children](#), fathers and mothers higher in hostile sexism exhibited less responsive parenting behavior.

A second study involved observing 532 family interactions and replicated the effects of study 1. Both fathers and mothers higher in hostile sexism exhibited less responsive parenting [behavior](#), regardless of children's gender.

Dr. Overall notes that the discovery that mothers who agree with hostile sexism were likely to be less responsive parents was unexpected, and warrants further research.

"Accepting fathers' authority could mean that mothers higher in hostile sexism follow fathers' lead in directing [family](#) interactions, producing less engaged and child-focused parenting," Dr. Overall explains.

"Another possibility is that [mothers](#) higher in hostile sexism guard their role as caregiver by restricting [fathers'](#) parental involvement, which detracts from being responsive to their children."

Responsive parenting is [pivotal to healthy child development](#), and its absence can lead to behavioral issues, emotional difficulties, and lower academic achievement.

While the findings are insightful, they do not establish that hostile sexism causes less responsive parenting. The associations remained strong even after considering alternative factors, but Dr. Overall notes that other explanations cannot be ruled out.

This study's implications extend beyond academia. To improve child well-being and reduce [gender inequality](#), addressing and challenging hostile attitudes about power dynamics between men and women within families is vital. Educational interventions focusing on these dynamics may effectively reduce sexist beliefs in both men and women, benefiting parenting and child well-being.

This research marks a critical milestone in understanding the impact of sexist attitudes on families and emphasizes the need for further exploration of pathways and interventions to reduce hostile [sexism](#) and enhance responsive parenting.

More information: Nickola C. Overall et al, Fathers' and Mothers' Sexism Predict Less Responsive Parenting Behavior During Family Interactions, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/19485506231200296](#)

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