

# Long term study shows impact of parental control over their children

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

(Medical Xpress)—A study conducted by a team of researchers at University College London has led to what they claim is a correlation between controlling behavior of parents and emotional well-being problems for the child later in life. In their paper published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, the team describes the nature of their study, and their views on what volunteers reported.

Most people likely believe that children raised in happy, loving homes, tend to turn out to be, for the most part, happy and reasonably comfortable in adult relationships—it's just common sense. Now, a team of researchers in Britain has found what they believe is proof that such common sense, is in fact quite accurate. The new results are part of a long-

term study that has been going on in that country since 1946, where 5,362 people were initially included in a National Survey of Health and Development meant to identify lifelong health issues—volunteers are contacted periodically and asked to participate in surveys or medical exams. In this newest study, the volunteers were asked to fill out a 25 question survey that focused in part on the relationship between them and their parents in the years after birth till age 16.

In looking at the results, the researchers report that parents who were deemed controlling by their offspring produced children that today believe themselves to have lower mental well-being and are less happy than people raised by supportive, less controlling parents. Controlling behavior, the researchers explain, was defined as not allowing children to make their own decisions, not letting them think on their own or to have their own opinions, invading their privacy, or engaging in behavior that fostered parental dependence. Particularly of note, the researchers found the impact was most profound for volunteers in the 60 to 64 year old age group, which was so strong the researchers likened it to the death of someone close.

In contrast, the volunteers who believed their parents were not controlling reported higher life satisfaction and feelings of good mental well-being. This agrees, the researchers note, with prior studies that have shown that children raised by such parents tend to grow up to be better at building and maintaining healthy relationships with other people. They conclude by suggesting their results also indicate that the government could help foster better parent-child relationships by sponsoring programs that reduce pressure on [parents](#).

**More information:** Parent-child relationships and offspring's positive mental wellbeing from adolescence to early older age, Stafford, Mai; Kuh,

Diana; Gale, Catharine; Mishra, Gita; Richards, Marcus, Accepted (In Press) *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2015.

### **Abstract**

Few longitudinal studies considered positive mental wellbeing outcomes. We addressed this gap using Medical Research Council National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD) data. Wellbeing was measured at ages 13-15 (teacher-rated happiness), 36 (life satisfaction), 43 (satisfaction with home and family life), and 60-64 years (Diener Satisfaction With Life scale and Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale). The Parental Bonding Instrument captured perceived care and control from the father and mother to age 16, recalled by study members at age 43. Greater wellbeing was seen for offspring with higher combined parental care and lower combined parental psychological control (p

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