

Research Briefing 1

Not All Mothers With High Parenting Stress Have the Same Support Needs

Findings from the Growing Up in Scotland Study

The study examined:

- (1) How parenting stress varies according to maternal education level; and
- (2) How this variation is related to mothers' support needs, among families with a 10 month old infant.

It used information from over 5,800 families in the Growing Up in Scotland second birth cohort, with children born in 2010 or 2011.



What is parenting stress?

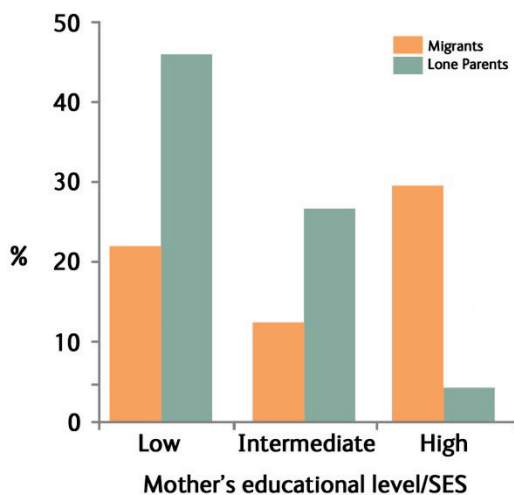
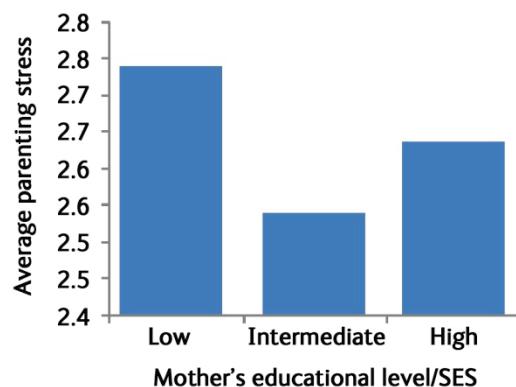
Parenting stress is the term given to stress involved in caring for a child.

High stress levels may be associated with poorer parenting.

Main findings

Parenting stress¹ is higher among mothers with high and mothers with low educational qualifications, than among mothers with intermediate qualifications² (see Figure on right). Education is a measure of socio-economic status (SES); higher qualifications = higher SES.

Social patterning of parenting stress



Similar stress levels among low and high SES mothers are produced in different ways. Low SES mothers are most likely to be stressed by economic hardship, while high SES mothers are most likely to be stressed by the demands of combining parenthood with a career.

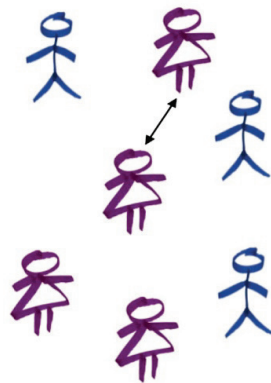
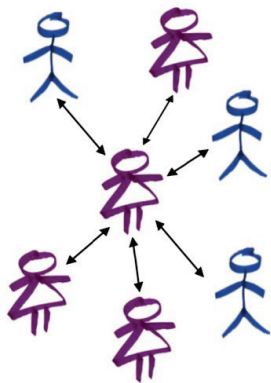
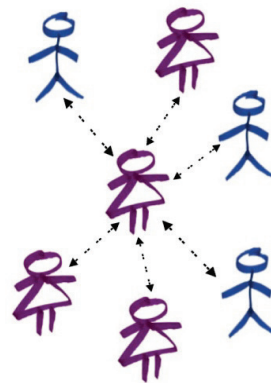


High parenting stress is linked to lower support. Low and high SES groups contain many mothers likely to lack support (migrants to Scotland from overseas or the rest of the UK; and lone parents, see Figure left).

Low and high SES mothers lack different aspects of (continued over)

¹ Parenting stress was measured using mothers' agreement with 3 statements from the Parental Stress Scale (Berry and Jones, 1995): "Having a child leaves little time and flexibility in my life"; "It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child"; "Having a child has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life". Responses on a 5-point scale from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree".

² Mothers' education was divided into: high (degree-level), intermediate (university-entry level, or upper-level school leaving age qualifications) and low (lower level qualifications, or none).

support (see red text in box below)

Mothers education/SES			
Support	Low	Intermediate	High
Social Networks	 <p>Smaller networks - few friends/grandparents to rely on (for lone mothers, the maternal grandmother often the only grandparent in contact).</p>	 <p>Large networks of grandparents, other relatives and friends for regular support.</p>	 <p>Less regular contact - grandparents further away, and mothers have less time to see friends and extended family outside working hours.</p>
Childcare	 <p>Mothers likely to work part time, with childcare by grandparents.</p>		<p>More work full time – and depend on availability of childminder or nursery, as grandparents often too far away.</p>
Health and Welfare Services	<p>Barriers to access - low awareness and trust, fears of interference or stigma.</p>	 <p>Positive attitudes to professional support for parents.</p>	

Implications for practice

- Careful assessment of support needs by health and social care practitioners is required for high SES/advantaged, as well as low SES/disadvantaged mothers.
- Low SES/disadvantaged groups may be helped via measures improving access to health and welfare services, and restoring relations with grandparents.
- High SES/advantaged groups may be helped via improved access to childcare, as well as internet and telephone resources.

Full details of this research are in Parkes, Alison; Sweeting, Helen; Wight, Daniel. 2015 [Parenting stress and parent support among mothers with high and low education](#). Journal of Family Psychology, Vol 29(6), Dec 2015, 907-918. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000129>

For more information on the Growing Up in Scotland study, please visit <http://growingupinscotland.org.uk/>

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Improving health and reducing inequalities through the study of social influences on health and wellbeing.

