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Working mothers pass on stress to kids

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23 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Working mothers pass on stress to kids

Working mothers take heed. A new report published in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* suggests that mothers who work in jobs that offer little satisfaction and are emotionally draining pass on their stress to their children. The researchers, from the UK's Bath, Kent and Bristol universities, found that young children are particularly susceptible to picking up on their mother's stress. According to the report, putting a child in childcare, where youngsters will play and happily interact with other tots, can help to counter the problem. Co-author Julie Cobb said childcare provides a sanctuary for children that protects them from the adverse effects of their mother's "emotional exhaustion". Ms. Cobb urged companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers analyzed data gleaned from observing 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study team quizzed mothers about their working conditions and domestic life over the course of six months. The subsequent results showed significantly higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol in children whose working mothers found their jobs less rewarding. Cortisol regulates blood pressure and the body's immune function and is secreted at greater rates when people are stressed. Further, researchers found the chemical's prevalence in the toddlers increased considerably if their mothers were fatigued as well as dissatisfied. In many cases, cortisol levels were double those of children whose mothers enjoyed their job.

Source: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/112141050/ABSTRACT>

WARM-UPS

1. MOTHERS: You are a working mother (or father) with four young children. Walk around the class and talk to the other “working mothers” (or fathers) about your life. What are the pressures of working and having four kids? Are you stressed? Are your children stressed?

2. STRESSFUL THINGS: In pairs / groups, talk about the things that make you stressed. Do you think these things also make children stressed? Look at this list. Discuss how much the items in it make you stressed. Why might these things make children stressed?

- Working
- Studying English
- Christmas (or other celebrations)
- Commuting
- In-laws
- Shopping
- Money
- Computers
- Small children
- George W. Bush

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Mothers / working mothers / job satisfaction / stress / young children / childcare / sanctuaries / emotional exhaustion / domestic life / hormones / blood pressure

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. WORKING MOTHERS OPINIONS: Do you agree with these opinions on working mothers? Discuss them with your partner(s).

- a. Mothers should stay at home and look after their children.
- b. Governments should offer more schemes to encourage mothers to work.
- c. Working mothers have more money to spend on their children’s education.
- d. Every company should provide play facilities for the children of the staff.
- e. Children whose mothers work do not become good members of society.
- f. Children of working mothers quickly become independent and more confident.
- g. Mothers who work neglect their children’s upbringing.
- h. The government should operate schemes for mothers to work from the home.
- i. Women should not have children if they also want a career.
- j. Birthrates would increase if mothers didn’t have to work.

5. STRESS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “stress”. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Working mothers relieve stress by having more children. T / F
- b. Mothers who dislike their job pass on their stress to their children. T / F
- c. Young children are particularly resilient to stress. T / F
- d. Childcare facilities offer a haven against stress for toddlers. T / F
- e. A study required working moms to write a quiz about their home life. T / F
- f. The stress hormone cortisol decreased in kids if mum hated her job. T / F
- g. The mother's tiredness had no effect on cortisol levels in children. T / F
- h. Cortisol levels were tripled in children whose mothers hated their job. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. take heed | questioned |
| b. draining | negative |
| c. susceptible | released |
| d. tots | taxing |
| e. adverse | controls |
| f. gleaned | beware |
| g. quizzed | exhausted |
| h. regulates | children |
| i. secreted | gathered |
| j. fatigued | vulnerable |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. emotionally | mothers about their working conditions |
| b. children are particularly susceptible | the problem |
| c. youngsters will play and | to picking up on their mother's stress |
| d. help to counter | observing 56 nursery school children |
| e. childcare provides | draining |
| f. data gleaned from | whose mothers enjoyed their job |
| g. the study team quizzed | a sanctuary for children |
| h. results showed significantly higher | rates when people are stressed |
| i. secreted at greater | levels of the stress hormone cortisol |
| j. levels were double those of children | happily interact with other tots |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WORD ORDER: Put the underlined words back into the correct order.

Working mothers pass on stress to kids

Working mothers take heed. A new report published in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* mothers who suggests that work in jobs that offer little satisfaction and are emotionally pass on their stress to draining their children. The researchers, from the UK's Bath, Kent and Bristol universities, found that young children are particularly up to picking on their susceptible mother's stress. According to the report, putting a child in childcare, where youngsters will play and other tots with interact happily, can help to counter the problem. Co-author Julie Cobb said childcare provides a sanctuary for children that effects them from the protects adverse of their mother's "emotional exhaustion". Ms. Cobb urged companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers from observing analyzed gleaned data 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study team quizzed mothers about domestic conditions life and their working over the course of six months. The subsequent results showed significantly higher levels of the stress hormone found children in cortisol mothers whose working their jobs less rewarding. Cortisol regulates blood pressure and the body's immune function and is greater secreted at people when rates are stressed. Further, researchers found the chemical's prevalence in the toddlers increased considerably if their mothers were fatigued as well as dissatisfied. In many cases, cortisol double children were levels of those whose mothers enjoyed their job.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Working mothers pass on stress to kids

Working mothers _____. A new report published in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* suggests that mothers who work in jobs that offer little satisfaction and are emotionally _____ pass on their stress to their children. The researchers, from the UK's Bath, Kent and Bristol universities, found that young children are particularly _____ to picking up on their mother's stress. According to the report, putting a child in childcare, where youngsters will play and happily _____ with other tots, can help to counter the problem. Co-author Julie Cobb said childcare provides a _____ for children that protects them from the _____ effects of their mother's "emotional exhaustion". Ms. Cobb _____ companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers analyzed data _____ from observing 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study team _____ mothers about their working conditions and domestic life over the course of six months. The _____ results showed significantly higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol in children whose working mothers found their jobs less rewarding. Cortisol _____ blood pressure and the body's immune function and is secreted at greater rates when people are stressed. Further, researchers found the chemical's _____ in the toddlers increased considerably if their mothers were _____ as well as dissatisfied. In many cases, cortisol levels were _____ those of children whose mothers enjoyed their job.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'child'** and **'care'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WORD ORDER: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers.

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "WORKING MOTHERS" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about working mothers and stressed mothers.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| • heed | • gleaned |
| • draining | • domestic |
| • susceptible | • hormone |
| • happily | • secreted |
| • sanctuary | • prevalence |
| • urged | • double |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of the findings of the study mentioned in the article?
- c. How much of a problem do you think it is when mothers pass on their stress to their children?
- d. Did your mother work and was she stressed?
- e. How do you think a mother's stress affects her children?
- f. Do you think mothers and children should be given drugs to counter the increased levels of cortisol?
- g. Is placing children in a childcare center all day a good idea?
- h. Should working mothers do more to make sure they are not stressed when they are with their children?
- i. What things in your daily life make you stressed?
- j. How do you relieve your stress levels?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think governments should do to promote a healthier family life?
- d. What responsibilities do you think companies have to provide childcare facilities for working mothers?
- e. Do you think working mothers should get a lighter working load in the workplace?
- f. Do you think it is a good idea to have web cams connecting mother and child while the mother is working?
- g. Do you think mothers who work neglect their children?
- h. Do you think the government should set up a scheme whereby mothers can work from home?
- i. Do you think it is easier for children of working mothers to turn into delinquents?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

STRESS RELIEF: You are a stress counselor. In pairs / groups, discuss the best way of relieving stress from the following sources:

STRESS	SUGGESTIONS FOR RELIEF
Children	
Money worries	
Job security	
The future	
My looks / weight / stomach size	
Studying	
The world	
My boss / co-workers	
Other	

- Change partners and compare and share your ideas.
- Decide on the best idea for stress relief for each of the points in the table.
- Return to your original partner(s) and discuss the ideas you talked about with your previous partner.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on parental stress. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. STRESS RELIEF: Make a poster outlining the different ways mothers can reduce their stress levels before they go home to their children. What can mothers do to relieve their stress as they leave work, travel home or open their front door? Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

4. LETTER: You are a very stressed working parent or the child of a very stressed working parent. Write a letter to your government explaining your stressful situation. Give the government advice on how to help working parents. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. T e. F f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. take heed | beware |
| b. draining | taxing |
| c. susceptible | vulnerable |
| d. tots | children |
| e. adverse | negative |
| f. gleaned | gathered |
| g. quizzed | questioned |
| h. regulates | controls |
| i. secreted | released |
| j. fatigued | exhausted |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. emotionally | draining |
| b. children are particularly susceptible | to picking up on their mother's stress |
| c. youngsters will play and | happily interact with other tots |
| d. help to counter | the problem |
| e. childcare provides | a sanctuary for children |
| f. data gleaned from | observing 56 nursery school children |
| g. the study team quizzed | mothers about their working conditions |
| h. results showed significantly higher | rates when people are stressed |
| i. secreted at greater | levels of the stress hormone cortisol |
| j. levels were double those of children | whose mothers enjoyed their job |

WORD ORDER:

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