

New research shows parental behaviour not affected by stress and anxiety of premature birth

2 June 2015, by Nicola Jones



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The stress and worry of giving birth prematurely does not adversely affect a mother's parenting behaviour, according to researchers at the University of Warwick.

Preterm children often require special care in the [neonatal period](#) including incubator care or assistance with breathing. Previous research has suggested that this stress, separation and an increased tendency for depression may impair a mother's parenting behaviour and adversely affect preterm children's long term development.

However, a new paper from the University of Warwick shows that mothers of [preterm children](#), despite the early stress they experienced, were as sensitive and responsive in interactions with their children as mothers of children born at term.

In the study, which has just been published in *Pediatrics*, two researchers from the University of Warwick's Department of Psychology analysed all

studies that had observed mother-child interactions with preterm children compared to children born at term in the first eight years of life. In total they analysed 3,905 children and their mothers from 34 different studies.

The paper's first author, University of Warwick researcher Ayten Bilgin, said: "More than one in ten children are born preterm in the world. These findings are reassuring that regardless of mother's initial shock and stress, mothers of preterm children can provide the same sensitive parenting. There is no evidence for the speculation that parents of preterm children, on average, are less good in their parenting."

The researchers also found even [mothers](#) of very preterm children who had experienced the longest time in hospital were as sensitive with their infants and children in their parenting behaviour. This was independent of whether the studies were conducted in North America, Europe or Australia.

Professor Dieter Wolke, the senior author, added: "This is a good message for parents of preterm children. However, recent findings indicate that preterm children might need even higher levels of maternal sensitivity and facilitation to achieve similar cognitive, behavioural outcomes to full-term children. There is a need to provide parents of preterm children the necessary assistance in parenting in the preschool and early school years for their children to develop at their full potential."

More information: "Maternal Sensitivity in Parenting Preterm Children: A Meta-analysis." *Pediatrics* peds.2014-3570; published ahead of print June 1, 2015, [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2014-3570](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-3570)

Provided by University of Warwick

APA citation: New research shows parental behaviour not affected by stress and anxiety of premature birth (2015, June 2) retrieved 27 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-parental-behaviour-affected-stress-anxiety.html>

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