Relationships Australia

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Recent Research Abstracts

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PARENTING

Mortensen, E.L; Michaelsen, K.F.; Sanders, S.A. & Reinisch, J.M. (2002) The association between duration of breastfeeding and adult intelligence. *JAMA The Journal of the American Medical Association, 287 (18), 2365-71*

Prospective longitudinal birth cohort study conducted in Copenhagen, Denmark. Duration of breastfeeding measured by physician interview at 12 months, and Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale administered at age 27 for one sample, and Borge Priens Prove test at 19 years for a second sample. 13 possible confounding factors were included – parental social status and education; single mother status; mother's height, age and weight gain during pregnancy and cigarette consumption during the third trimester; number of pregnancies; estimated gestational age; birth weight; birth length; indexes of pregnancy and delivery complications. Independent of a wide range of possible confounding factors, a significant positive association between duration of breastfeeding and intelligence was observed in 2 independent samples of young adults with 2 different intelligence tests.

Mirowsky, J. & Ross, C.E. (2002) Depression, parenthood and age at first birth. *Social Science and Medicine 54 (8), 1281-99*

This study tests the hypothesis that the correlation between current depression and parenthood depends on the age at first birth for adults. To test the hypothesis, we analysed data from at 1995 survey of 2592 US adults aged 18 to 95. Among the parents we find a generally negative association between age at first birth and recent feelings and signs of depression, adjusting for age, sex, minority status and education of the respondent's parents. Respondents who had a first birth before age 23 report more feelings and signs of depression than do non-parents. The association between depression and age at first birth is monotonic for males by parabolic for females. The age at first birth associated with the lowest predicted depression for females is around 30. Regression analyses indicate that several correlates account for the apparent psychological benefits of delaying first birth – later first marriages, higher educational attainment, lower risk of having had a prolonged period needing a job but being unable to find one, lower risk of having had periods lacking the money for household necessities and better current physical health. For women, health consequences limit the emotional benefits of prolonged delay of first birth.

Cartwright, C. & Seymour, F. (2002) Young adults' perceptions of parents' responses in stepfamilies: What hurts? What helps? *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 37 (3/4), 123-142.*

Stepfamily relationship research has emphasized the stepparent role and relationships between stepparents and stepchildren, neglecting the study of biological parent-child relationships in stepfamily households. In this study, 28 young adults from stepfamilies participated in group interviews that focused on their perceptions of parental responses in childhood stepfamily situations. A number of themes emerged around parental responses experienced as hurtful or helpful. These included the importance for children of parental attention and communication, perceptions of loyalty, discipline issues, parental decisions related to transitions and the ongoing relationship with the non-resident parent. It is argued that the bioparent-child relationship may be more important to child wellbeing than the stepparent-stepchild relationship, and that increased research emphasis on this biological dyad will contribute to an understanding of healthy stepfamily adjustment.