

Hatton, C., & Emerson, E. (2009). Does socioeconomic position moderate the impact of child behaviour problems on maternal health in South Asian families with a child with intellectual disabilities? *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 34(1), 10-16.

Research has consistently found a link between child behaviour problems and distress in parents of children with intellectual disabilities. However, a recent study (Emerson, 2003) suggests that this association may be moderated by the socioeconomic status of the family, in that the association between these factors may be most evident in more affluent families. The purpose of the present study is to replicate and extend these findings in a sample of South Asian families in the UK.

As part of a larger study of this population in the UK, 123 South Asian mothers of children with severe intellectual disabilities participated in this study. Most mothers (87.8%) were married, with an average age of 39 years. Nearly 90% of the families represented in this sample were below the median household income in the UK, and 58.2% did not speak English. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were gathered on demographics, child problem behaviours, parental mental health (distress, anxiety and depression) and parental physical health. Participants were interviewed in their homes in their preferred language.

### **Key findings:**

#### ***1. Relationships between child behaviours, socioeconomic position and maternal well-being***

- Mothers with higher levels of anxiety and distress, as well as those rating themselves as having fair, poor or very poor health, reported higher levels of child problem behaviours.
- Mothers in lower socioeconomic position (SEP) did not rate their levels of anxiety, distress, or depression, or their health status differently than those in higher SEP.

#### ***2. The effect of SEP on the relationship between child behaviours and maternal well-being***

- The relationship between child behaviour problems and maternal well-being varied, depending on SEP. In the presence of problem behaviours, mothers with lower SEP had higher levels of anxiety and depression, and poor ratings of self-reported health than mothers with higher SEP.
- SEP did not impact the relationship between child behaviour problems and maternal distress.

Similar to the findings of Emerson (2003), the relationships between child behaviour problems and some measures of parental well-being (anxiety, depression and physical health) were impacted by socioeconomic position, in that the effect of behaviour problems on well-being was stronger in families with more resources. Overall, as found in Emerson's study with White parents of children with intellectual disabilities, the well-being of more affluent South Asian mothers was more strongly impacted by child problem behaviours than was the well-being of mothers with fewer resources. Therefore, regardless of ethnic origin, the relationship among variables was similar.

These results support the importance of conducting research with families from across the socioeconomic spectrum, and from a variety of ethnic groups. Further, the authors suggest that policy makers and practitioners should consider how services designed to reduce problem behaviour and enhance parental mental health might affect families with fewer resources, if these programs do not also take into account the broader environment in which families live.