

Parental time pressure and financial stress - Challenges for mental health of Nordic children and adolescents

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- I. Gunnarsdottir H, Povlsen L, Ringsberg KC. Health lifestyles of preschool children in Nordic countries – parents’ perspectives. *Health Promotion International*, 2013. [E-pub ahead of print]. DOI: 10.1093/heapro/dat079
- II. Gunnarsdottir H, Petzold M, Povlsen L. Time pressure among parents in Nordic countries: A population based cross-sectional study. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 2014; 42(2):137-145.
- III. Gunnarsdottir H, Bjereld Y, Hensing G, Petzold M, Povlsen L. Associations between parents’ subjective time pressures and mental health problems among children in the Nordic countries. A population based study. Submitted for publication.
- IV. Gunnarsdottir H, Hensing G, Povlsen L, Petzold M. Relative deprivation in the Nordic countries - Child mental health problems in relation to family financial stress. Submitted for publication.

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ABSTRACT

Mental health problems are a significant public health concern affecting approximately 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide. Parents' conditions and experiences are important in determining children's circumstances, health and development; however, few studies exist on parental everyday life challenges and children's health. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to explore parents' experiences of everyday life challenges and, more specifically, how children's and adolescents' mental health problems are associated with parental time pressure and financial stress.

Methods: Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather and analyse data from parents in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). Interviews were conducted with 25 parents regarding their experiences of everyday life challenges, and the collected data analysed by qualitative content analysis. Data was gathered from 7805 parents of children 2-17 years old by a postal survey and associations examined with simple and multiple logistic regression analysis in three cross-sectional studies.

Results: Parents described everyday life, influenced by demands and expectations, and time pressure as considerable challenges. Time pressure was reported as an issue in keeping up with daily life by 14.2% of mothers and 11.6% of fathers. Increased odds of mental health problems were found among both boys (OR 1.80 95% CI 1.32-2.46) and girls (OR 1.95 95% CI 1.42-2.66) of parents experiencing time pressure. A significantly larger proportion of parents in Iceland reported financial stress than in the other countries. Children of parents with financial stress had increased odds of mental health problems in all the countries (Denmark OR 2.59 95% CI 1.77-3.78; Finland OR 2.09 95% CI 1.44-3.03; Norway OR 2.19 95% CI 1.42-3.38; Sweden OR 2.51 95% CI 1.65-3.81) but this was significantly lower in Iceland (OR 1.33 95% CI 0.92-1.92) than the others.

Conclusions: In light of time pressure as a growing feature of modern societies, the findings in this thesis may contribute to the explanation as to why mental health problems are common among children in Nordic countries in spite of otherwise favourable conditions for child health and development. The differences in the associations of financial stress and children's mental health problems between countries, with the weakest associations seen where the prevalence of financial stress was highest, emphasises the importance of considering mechanisms of social comparison and relative deprivation as potential contributors to mental health problems among children and adolescents.

Keywords: children, parents, mental health problems, strengths and difficulties questionnaire, Nordic countries, time pressure, financial stress

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