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Poorer parents are just as involved in their children's activities as better-off parents

Poorer parents are just as involved in education, leisure, and sports activities with their children as better-off parents, a new study has found.

Dr Esther Dermott and Marco Pomati analysed survey data on 1,665 UK households and found that poorer parents were as likely to have helped with homework, attended parents' evenings, and played sports or games with their children in the previous week.

Dr Dermott, of the University of Bristol, and Mr Pomati, Cardiff University, say they found no evidence of a group of poor parents who failed their children.

"Those with lower incomes or who felt poor were as likely to engage in all of the good parent-child activities as everyone else," they say in an article published online in the journal *Sociology*.

"The findings support the view that associations made between low levels of education, poverty and poor parenting are ideologically driven rather than based on empirical evidence. Claims that families who are poor or are less well educated do not engage in high profile good parenting practices are misplaced." They found no evidence of a group of parents who failed to participate in parent-child activities, they say.

"This is potentially important since recent political discourse has not only promoted the idea that poor parenting exists but also emphasised the existence of a group of parents who persistently fail to engage in parenting activities that are beneficial for their children."

The researchers used data from the '2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK' survey on parents of children aged up to 16 years old.

When questioned, over 50 per cent of all parents said that during the previous week they had read to their children and played games with them on at least four days. A similar result was found for helping with homework and with eating a meal and watching TV with their children. It also found that 28 per cent of parents had done sports with children at least four days during the previous seven.

The researchers then compared responses between poorer parents – defined as those whose household income was below 60% of the average (median) – and the others in the sample.

They found that there was no significant difference between the proportion of poorer parents and other parents who had done sports or games with their children on four or more days during the past week, or who had read to them or helped them with their homework. Poorer parents were more likely to have watched TV with their children on four or more days during the previous week (34%, compared to 24% of other parents).

The researchers note that the results indicate that poorer parents engaged in a wide range of good parenting practices despite their lack of resources. It might have been expected that those who are poor engage in good parenting practices less frequently because they lack the material resources to do so, they say.

The journal *Sociology* is published by SAGE and the British Sociological Association.

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Notes:

1. The article is entitled: 'Good' Parenting Practices: How Important Are Poverty, Education and Time Pressure?'

2. The researchers used the Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK survey, carried out between March and December 2012. Among the questions it asked were:

Education

- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner read stories with your child/children or talked with them about what they are reading?
- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner helped with or discussed homework with your child/children?

Leisure

- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner played games with your child/children e.g. computer games, toys, puzzles, etc.?
- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner done sporting or physical activities with your child/children?
- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner watched TV with your child/children?

Family mealtimes

- How many days in the past seven days have you, or your partner eaten an evening meal with your child/children?

The survey then compared the proportion of parents who said they had carried out activities on four or more days in the previous week. The researchers defined poor parents as those on less than 60% of the median of income.

3. The University of Bristol is one of the most popular and successful universities in the UK. It was ranked within the top 30 universities in the world in the QS World University rankings 2013 and 7th in the country. The University of Bristol is ranked among the top five institutions in the UK for its research, according to new analysis of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014. Bristol is a member of the Russell Group of UK research-intensive universities, and a member of the Worldwide Universities Network, a grouping of research-

led institutions of international standing. It has over 15,000 undergraduates and nearly 6,000 postgraduate students from more than 100 countries, and its research links span the globe.

4. The British Sociological Association's charitable aim is to promote sociology. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britisoc.co.uk