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New report proves truth of ‘Happy Wife, Happy Life’ slogan (especially if she is happy as a new mum).



- **New analysis of data from up to 13,000 UK families show that a mum’s level of happiness has a direct effect on her children’s mental health, the stability of her relationship with the children’s father, and her closeness to her children when teenagers.**
- **A mum’s happiness level is nearly twice as important as a dad’s happiness level as an indicator of whether a couple will stay together.**
- **Mums who report a high level of happiness when their child is 9 months old are more likely to maintain a good level of happiness when their child is a teenager.**

‘Happy Wife, Happy Life’ has become a well-known phrase – with plaques, T-shirts, socks, mugs, hats and cushions available, all of which bear the slogan, as well as an American TV show. But opinion has been divided – sometimes leading to heated debate - as to how accurate this ‘truth’ actually is.

Now a new report released by Marriage Foundation – using data from the Millennium Cohort Study - argues that the happiness of a mother has considerably more impact on the subsequent outcome and stability of her family than the father’s happiness.

The report by Harry Benson, research director for Marriage Foundation, and Professor Steve McKay of the University of Lincoln analysed Millennium Cohort Study data from up to 13,000 UK couples (married or co-habiting) with a child born in 2000 or 2001.

They looked at the link between how happy each parent was with their relationship when the child was 9 months old and (1) their subsequent happiness with their relationship 14 years later, (2) whether they stayed together during this period, (3) whether their teenagers displayed high levels of mental health problems, and (4) how close parents reported their relationship with their teenage children.

The results showed that all four outcomes were predicted more strongly by the mum’s initial happiness than by the dad’s.

In particular, mum’s happiness was twice as important as dad’s happiness for predicting whether parents would stay together. And whereas mum’s happiness was also twice as important for predicting the presence of

subsequent mental health problems in their teenage boys, only mum's happiness was linked to the subsequent mental health of their teenage girls.

"I've always argued that the key to happy family life is for dad to love mum and she will love him right back, in that order. Previous research has supported this idea but it's been bitty," says Harry Benson, also co-author with his wife Kate of the bestseller *What Mums Want and Dads Need to Know*. *"We think this is the first serious attempt to test the truth of the saying Happy Wife Happy Life across four different family outcomes."*

The findings sit well with the idea that as a new mother's attention shifts automatically to her child, it is the father who needs to take prime responsibility for the parental relationship. When he does and the mother is happy with her relationship, the stage is set for family outcomes to prosper.

"Equality has been excellent for encouraging women into work and men into childcare. But many men now struggle to find a unique role for themselves in family life," adds Benson, himself married for 33 years and father of six. *"This research suggests a compelling solution. Men, the best thing you can do for your family is to love the mother of your children. Happy wife, happy life."*

Sir Paul Coleridge, former high court judge and chairman of Marriage Foundation adds: *"As with so many traditional family myths, there is more than a grain of truth in this one as the evidence demonstrates. In all the contemporary discussion about the appropriate roles for mums and dads in today's well adjusted family it is still crucial not to forget the vital role of wife/mother as the lynch pin. Dads would do themselves and theirs children a favour if they bore in mind that being supportive and kind to the mother of their children is not a sign of weakness but strength and self confidence."*

Full report available from Harry Benson (07515 699187 / harry.benson@virgin.net) or Rhoda Hardie (0781 542 7111 / Rhoda.hardie.pr@gmail.com).

To discuss interviews, please contact Harry or Rhoda.

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About Marriage Foundation

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

A source of statistics on marriage, cohabitation, commitment, divorce and family breakdown can be found on the Marriage Foundation website: <http://marriagefoundation.org.uk/>