

Having it all – Career, Motherhood, and Emotionally Healthy Children
Helping Working Mothers Protect their Children from the Risk of Depression

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Abstract

Research has identified that levels of both adolescent and maternal depression have been increasing over the last several generations, as have levels of maternal employment, and that children of depressed mothers are at heightened risk for depression. There is speculation by researchers that due to their employment status, working mothers are not only increasing their risk of depression but are also increasing the risk of depression for their children (Goodman & Crouter, 2009; Holmes, Erickson, & Hill, 2012; Liss, Shriffrin, & Rizzo, 2012). However, other research suggests there are also benefits for mothers working outside the home, indicating their well-being may be enhanced by working, potentially providing emotional effects protective against depression (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Luecken et al., 1997; Sweeting, West, Young, & Der, 2010). These conflicts present a quandary for psychologists attempting to study these phenomena. The nature of the mother-child relationship is a critical factor in depression risk for both mothers and their children, regardless of employment status (Barnett, 2004; Pound, Puckering, Cox, & Mills, 1988; Thapar, Collishaw, Pine & Thapar, 2012; Wills & Brauer, 2012). The field of positive psychology includes concepts and tools that provide opportunities to improve the quality of the mother-child relationship and to enhance the well-being of both mothers and children. Enhanced well-being has been found to be protective against depression (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Specific relevant concepts and tools are discussed and presented.

Keywords: adolescent depression, engagement, gratitude, maternal depression, maternal well-being, mother-child relationship, positive emotion, positive psychology, targeted interventions, well-being