Predictors of mothers’ self-identified challenges in parenting infants: Insights from a large, nationally diverse cohort

Maria T. Corkin* • Elizabeth R. Petersona • Natalija Andrejic • Karen E. Waldie • Elaine Reese b • Susan M.B. Morton c, d

a School of Psychology, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
b Department of Psychology, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
c Centre for Longitudinal Research, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
d School of Population Health, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

*Correspondence author

Correspondence author: M.T. Corkin, School of Psychology, University of Auckland, P O Box 92109, New Zealand. Email: mcor009@aucklanduni.ac.nz

E.R. Peterson • N. Andrejic • K.E. Waldie • S.M.B. Morton, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

E. Reese, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Abstract

Being a parent of an infant is full of challenges, yet little is known about how child, mother, family, or socio-contextual factors relate to mothers’ self-identified challenges. Mothers of infants from a large (N= 6383) representative longitudinal sample of New Zealand children and their families were asked to report their biggest challenge over the first nine months of their infant’s life. Thematic analysis was used to identify five main maternal parenting challenges: ‘Challenges fulfilling maternal role and responsibility’; ‘Time management/work issues’; ‘Sleep deprivation’; ‘Personal change and adjustment’ and ‘Attributes of the child’. Using binomial logistic regression analyses, a range of child, maternal, family and contextual factors related to the reporting of the challenges were identified. The strongest predictors of maternal challenges were parity, which predicted four of the five main challenges, and ethnicity, which predicted three challenges. Health and development of the child was found to be associated with two of the five challenges, while maternal age, child’s negative affect, parenting confidence, parenting satisfaction, mother being in paid employment and gender of the child were each associated with one challenge. Our findings about the factors that may lead mothers of infants to be more likely to experience particular challenges are informative not only for health professionals working alongside mothers and their infants, but can potentially support the development of policies that enhance the well-being of New Zealand families.

Keywords: Mothers, Challenges, Infants, Maternal role, Parity

Correspondence author: M.T. Corkin, School of Psychology, University of Auckland, P O Box 92109, New Zealand. Email: mcort009@aucklanduni.ac.nz
Acknowledgements

Growing Up in New Zealand has been funded by the New Zealand Ministries of Social Development, Health, Education, Justice and Pacific Island Affairs; the former Ministry of Science Innovation and the former Department of Labour (now both part of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment); the former Ministry of Women’s Affairs (now the Ministry for Women); the Department of Corrections; the Families Commission (now known as the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit); Te Puni Kokiri; New Zealand Police; Sport New Zealand; the Housing New Zealand Corporation; and the former Mental Health Commission, The University of Auckland and Auckland UniServices Limited. Other support for the study has been provided by the NZ Health Research Council, Statistics New Zealand, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and the Office of Ethnic Affairs. The study has been designed and conducted by the Growing Up in New Zealand study team, led by the University of Auckland. The authors acknowledge the contributions of the original study investigators: Susan M.B. Morton, Polly E. Atatoa Carr, Cameron C. Grant, Arier C. Lee, Dinusha K. Bandara, Jatender Mohal, Jennifer M. Kinloch, Johanna M. Schmidt, Mary R. Hedges, Vivienne C. Ivory, Te Kani R. Kingi, Renee Liang, Lana M. Perese, Elizabeth Peterson, Jan E. Pryor, Elaine Reese, Elizabeth M. Robinson, Karen E. Waldie, Clare R. Wall. The views reported in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Growing Up in New Zealand Investigators.