

Playing favorites is bad for child health

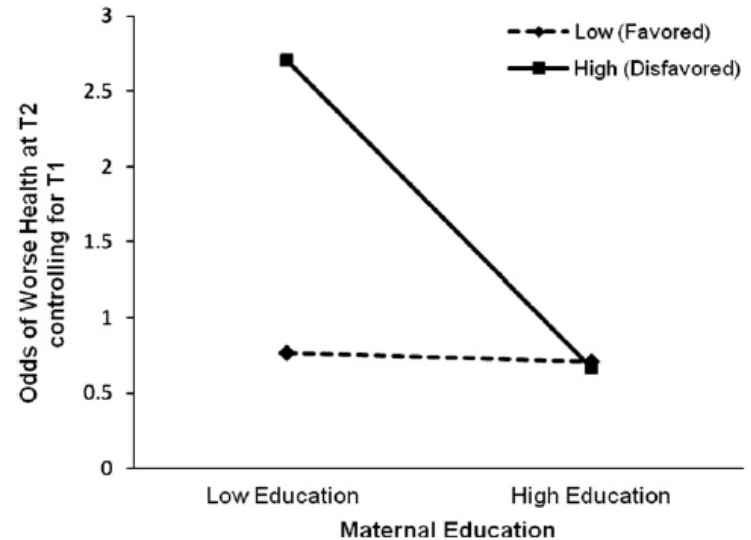
Dillon T. Browne & Jennifer M. Jenkins

Researchers have long known that children who are disfavored compared to their siblings have worse mental health. Kids who are in a place of disadvantage within the family become more aggressive, disobedient and emotionally unstable, over time.

In a study recently published in *Social Sciences and Medicine*, PhD student Dillon Browne and psychologist Jennifer Jenkins sought to determine if being a disfavored sibling can have negative consequences in terms of general health.

Browne and Jenkins followed 501 families over a period of 18 months as part of an investigation called the Kids, Families, Places Study, led by Dr. Jenkins at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Kids were an average of 2 years old at the initial assessment and approximately half were female.

Browne and Jenkins observed that disfavored kids had poorer mother-reported health 18 months later, after adjusting for their initial health status. However, this pattern was only observed in homes where mothers had low levels of education.



The authors concluded that multiple forms of disadvantage – within the home and within society – can combine to predict poor health outcomes for kids. The authors noted that, given the age of the children, it is likely that the negative health consequences are observed due to stress reactions, rather than unhealthy lifestyle choices.



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