

NEWS RELEASE

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Mothers who receive childcare support from maternal grandparents show more parental warmth, finds NTU Singapore study

Mothers whose parents help out with childcare are more likely to show their children parental warmth than mothers who do not receive any support, a study led by **Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** has found.

According to the NTU Singapore-led study, which analysed data from 615 mother-child pairs enrolled in the **Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) cohort study**¹, mothers of children aged 4½ years said they engaged in less frequent authoritarian (strict and controlling) parenting when the child's maternal grandparents stepped in to help.

When their child was six, mothers who had been supported by their own parents also reported engaging in more positive parenting, which is characterised by warmth, responsiveness, and a stimulating home environment.

Interestingly, the study did not find evidence to support an association between support from other types of caregiving arrangements – paternal grandparents, both maternal and paternal grandparents, or domestic helpers – and the abovementioned positive parenting approaches in mothers.

With the growing trend for grandparents and domestic helpers to become involved in childcare due to the prevalence of dual-income households, there is a need to understand the long-term effects of maternal grandparental, paternal grandparental, and non-kin help on grandchildren's outcomes and family well-being, said the researchers led by **Associate Professor Setoh Peipei** from the Psychology division at NTU's School of Social Sciences.

Associate Professor Setoh, who is also the Director of NTU's Early Cognition Lab, said: "While maternal grandparents, paternal grandparents, and domestic helpers all have the potential to provide instrumental assistance and emotional encouragement

¹ *GUSTO is a major collaborative research effort involving partners across Singapore from healthcare and research alike. See the Annex for more info.*

when it comes to childcare duties, our study found that childcare support from maternal grandparents was the most beneficial. This finding supports the idea introduced in earlier research that maternal grandparents are uniquely positioned to provide support in a manner most aligned with the needs of mothers, possibly due to shared values and ease of communication.”

While the study was done in Singapore, the research team said the findings that differentiate maternal grandparental support from paternal grandparental support could be relevant across Asian countries, where grandparental involvement in childcare is considered a cultural expectation.

The research team added that it would also be of interest to examine whether the benefits of maternal grandparenting extend into adolescence and emerging adulthood to influence the family’s life trajectories.

The study was published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* in May. It was conducted with researchers from A*STAR’s Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences, KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine), National Institute of Education, Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands, and the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health in the US.

How the study was conducted

To investigate the implications of childcare support from grandparents and domestic helpers in early childhood for family well-being outcomes, the research team looked at caregiving arrangement data from a sample of 615 mothers and their children across the time points of 4½ years old and 6 years old. The data was collected as part of the GUSTO study.

The study focused on mothers because while childcare support could potentially reduce the practical and emotional burdens of childcare for both mothers and fathers, earlier studies have shown that the impact of such support is presumed to be larger for mothers.

For this study, a caregiver is defined as someone who spends at least two hours of the time with the child during the entire week and is responsible for certain aspects of the child’s daily routine such as school drop-offs and pick-ups, bedtime routines, bathing, helping with schoolwork, and going on outings.

Of the 615 mother-child pairs studied, 446 pairs had data on caregiving arrangements at the 4½-year-old mark, while 514 pairs had data on caregiving arrangements at the 6-year-old mark.

The mother-child pairs were divided into five groups based on the type of caregivers:

- No support
- Domestic helpers
- Maternal grandparents
- Paternal grandparents
- Maternal and paternal grandparents

Mothers were asked to report family well-being outcomes, namely their parenting and well-being when their child was 4½ and 6 years old, and family functioning when children were 6 years old. The researchers then examined the association between each type of caregiving arrangement and family well-being outcomes.

When they turned 10, children were asked to report any depressive symptoms (such as self-loathing or anomalies in sleep and eating patterns) based on a validated questionnaire. The researchers then analysed this data against the caregiving arrangement their mother had reported to see if any associations existed.

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Notes to Editor:

Paper titled "[*Grandparents' and domestic helpers' childcare support: Implications for well-being in Asian families*](#)" published in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1–23.
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About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 33,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Engineering, Business, Science, Medicine, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg

ANNEX

About GUSTO

Set up in 2009, GUSTO (Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes) is a nationwide birth cohort study involving collaborators from KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), National University Health System (NUHS), National University of Singapore (NUS), and Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS).

It is a longitudinal study of Singaporean mothers and their offspring. Since its inception, the study has recruited 1,247 Singaporean pregnant women as volunteers. These volunteers are studied extensively during their pregnancy, and their offspring are closely followed up as they grow up.

GUSTO aims to understand how conditions during pregnancy and early childhood may affect the mothers' and children's health, growth and development, as well as metabolic, neurodevelopmental and other conditions – all of which are of major public health and economic importance in Asia and around the globe. The research spans across four themes, where the results from monitoring both mother and child help in developing public health policies; clinically-valuable, testable interventions; reduce the burden of childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases, e.g. diabetes; and improve neurodevelopmental outcomes in children.

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Health's National Medical Research Council (NMRC), and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR). In RIE2025, GUSTO is supported by funding from the NRF's Human Health and Potential (HHP) Domain, under the Human Potential Programme. <https://www.gusto.sg/>