

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ECONOMIC RESOURCE TO THE MOTHER'S WELLNESS AND PARENTAL FUNCTIONING

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***Abstract:** Motherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings with it many challenges with which the mother is forced to cope routinely. The mother, who today holds different roles in her life, as mother, earner of livelihood, wife, and others, is required more than ever to strengthen her wellness that is often harmed by the various challenges. Many research studies have presented the importance of wellness in general and its importance to parental functioning in particular as well as the place of the economic resource as the most meaningful resource for the increase of the wellness among mothers and as a factor that enables the presence of additional resources that contribute to their physical and mental health. Particularly in the State of Israel, which is considered a developed and advanced country, it is necessary to advance applied actions for the change of the social awareness on this topic and to broaden the economic resource that will enable high mental awareness among mothers.*

***Keywords:** motherhood, wellness, parental functioning, economic resource*

## **Importance of the Wellness to the Parental Functioning**

The changing reality in the modern era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings with it a constellation of complicated challenges that the mother faces and deals with on a daily basis. The coping, although it is often considered successful, entails significant influences on the mother's wellness and on her parental functioning.

The research of wellness in a person is not a new field. From the 1960s many attempts have been made to define and to measure the person's feeling of wellness. The concept is not easy to define because of the broad range of explicit and implicit expressions

of values through which it is possible to define the concept. These values are different between people, societies, and cultures.

There are a number of definitions of the term “wellness” in the professional literature, when they all agree in general about the view of the concept of wellness as a subjective perception based on the individual’s experiences and the individual’s manner of reference to the general quality of his life as positive and desired. The definitions fulfill the term of optimality or wellness as expressing a positive perception of the person’s mental health. The engagement in wellness focuses on the individual’s normal functioning, development, and empowerment. The approach leads the individual to the constant search for the resources that will allow them to cope effectively with the challenges of reality (Shedmi & Zimmerman, 2015).

Research studies from the past decade indicate the unequivocal relationship between the person’s physical health and wellness. The relationship was found to be two-way, for good and for bad; in other words, the person’s health influences his wellness but also the reverse, the person’s wellness influences, even twice as much, the physical health (Zimmerman, 2011).

The concept of ‘physical health’ is defined today as an objective state of the lack of illness, symptoms, or findings of tests indicating illness but also as a subjective state, which is commensurate with the person’s perception of his health state. Research studies have found that the person’s perception of his subjective health state influences his objective health state. For example, one of the research studies indicated that there is a relationship between positive emotions and health. Accordingly, the definition of the concept of “health” expresses the two aspects of the absence of illness on the one hand and subjective perception influenced by the person’s wellness on the other hand (Layard, 2010; Zimmerman, 2011).

Different situations of stress with which the individual copes may harm his immune system. During the period of infancy, and even before birth, the damage to the immune system as a result of a stressful situation can have lifelong immunological consequences. In one research study, the researchers created stressful situations among mother monkeys

during pregnancy, then separated the newborn monkeys from their mothers and harmed the natural conditions in which the monkeys are raised. These interventions on the researchers' part harmed the newborn monkeys' immune system (Coe & Lubach, 2006).

Many research studies have found that in a situation of stress experienced by the parent the influence is not only on the parent's wellness but also on the child, through the parent's functioning. The parent may reach a partial or full collapse and display a pattern of distorted parental functioning. The parent, even if she previously functions optimally, may now express an attitude of hostility towards the child who makes her life difficult. In this situation, the parent does not succeed in coping with the situation optimally and develops actions of powerlessness in the parental functioning. The powerlessness is manifested in the stopping or stagnation of the parent and in her survival through technical functioning, a situation in which the parent may feel lack of essentialness in the parental functioning. The parent will see to the child's basic needs, like nutrition and clothing, as well as her mental health and will allow the display of love towards the child, but all these will be held technically and not constantly. This manner of functioning constitutes for the parent a temporary respite in the general feeling of powerlessness the parent experienced, but his exhaustion and lack of availability to his emotions requires of the parent to continue and to act in a way that does not enable flexibility, thinking, and correction. The parent's needs for free thinking and receiving legitimacy for her changing attitudes conflicts with her feeling that she does not have the real possibility to stop and engage in her needs. The very parenting role constitutes a factor of many pressures even without the occurrence of an event of stress and the coping with failures and implications (Oren, 2015).

Additional research studies indicate that the children's quality of life depends on the mothers' health, safety, and wellness. The mothers are the main caregivers, and their mental and physical wellness is necessary for the creation of a positive environment that promotes their children's optimal development. Children, who received such an environment, were found to have greater mental and emotional health during their lives. The proposal that arises from these research studies emphasizes the importance of providing **economic resources** for the mother, which will allow for a beneficial platform to provide different services for the mothers, such as different health and assistance

services, income opportunities, and so on, so as to ensure, through the mothers' high wellness level, the best chance for the children's quality development. These research studies reveal a global report that ranks countries according to the benefits given to the mothers and their level of best situation and reflect significant differences between the mothers' situation in developed countries and their situation in developing countries (Wikipedia, n.d.).

### **Meaning of the Economic Resource for the Mother's Wellness**

A classic main theory that engages in the negative influences as a result of the multiplicity of the roles the working mother bears is the Role Strain Theory (Goode, 1960). This theory maintains that the individual's energy battery is limited and therefore the mother experiences a reality of multiplicity of roles and is required to recruit forces in addition to those existing in her, which may bring her to a feeling of conflict and stress at a high level.

In parallel to this theory, there are also modern theories that engage in the field of the sense of stress among working mothers, and one of the main ones is the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). The theory gives an explanation for the development of the conflict and feeling of stress and emphasizes the meaning of the resources required for coping with them. These resources are precious to individuals during their life, and they strive always to achieve them and preserve them. The resources can be the level of mental resilience, physical, emotional, and mental energies, an adjusted environment, and so on. The argument is that when the individuals feel any threat to the store of resources at their disposal or the loss of a resource or difficulty with achieving it, emotional psychological stress is created. According to this theory, it is possible to explain the development of the feeling of stress and the conflict that is created in the working mother as a result of the broad constellation of her roles, the load of the tasks of the roles, and the requirement to fill them and to maneuver among them. Therefore, a working mother who feels a threat to her workplace following the difficulty with meeting the demanding requirements will recruit additional resources that will help her fill them, a situation that may lead her to develop a high sense of stress. Many research studies that addressed the

matter supported this theory and found the negative outcomes of the multiplicity of roles among the working mothers (Lapierre & Allen, 2006).

Kulik and Liberman (2016) maintain that the mother's resources are divided into two types: a resource with a personal character and a resource with an environmental character. Personal resources include the health, economic, and educational situation. The environmental resource has the character of social support. The economic resource was found in many research studies to be the most significant resource for the mother and her wellness.

Findings that have steadily and increasingly been collected in recent years indicate the relationship between economic inequality and deficient mental health. Low income, unemployment, poverty, and debts are associated consistently in research studies with poor mental health in the population at large (Bronte-Tinkew & Calkins, 2001).

A high economic resource was found in many research studies as a resource that gives a sense of confidence, which contributes unequivocally to the reduction of the sense of stress and the increase of the wellness. In these research studies, a negative relationship was found between a high level of income and the feeling of stress. A high level of income enables the acquisition of additional resources that facilitate the coping and accordingly the reduction of conflicts and situations of stress (Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Jackson, 2001).

Additional research studies also found evidence of the influence of economic resources on the wellness and even the development of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and suicidal behavior. It was further found that there is a significant impact, cross-cultural, of economic material conditions and consumption on the wellness and the health in general (MacIntyre, Ferris, Gonçalves, & Quinn, 2018).

A research study carried out in a sample of immigrant mothers from Turkey and Germany found that the socioeconomic situation is a factor of influence over time on the mothers' wellness with implications on the quality of their children's development. 40% of the mothers with low levels of income and education suffered from depression. Higher financial resources increased the mothers' wellness and satisfaction with life in different

aspects. In contrast, a low socioeconomic situation and financial stress had a negative impact on the wellness. Furthermore, a low socioeconomic situation was linked to a higher frequency of depression. In other words, a high socioeconomic situation is a preventative factor, protecting against depression disorders (Fassbender & Leyendecker, 2018). Broader support of this specific argument about the mothers was also found in research studies that examined the relationship between the socioeconomic situation and the mental health in general.

In Israel an interesting research study was performed that found that mothers who have sparse economic resources and are classified with a low social-economic status have an incomparably higher feeling of conflict and stress than what is felt by mothers who have higher economic resources. Furthermore, it was found that parents with low income experience higher mental load and are more exposed to situations of risk of depression, mental distresses, low self-confidence and self-worth. They were also found to have a higher likelihood to experience negative life events and to have sparse resources to cope in the best way (Bronte-Tinkew & Calkins, 2001).

One research study found that women with high income were in a better health situation than women with low income. The given explanation is that women with high income have the possibility of acquiring a high level of health services, additional services, and leisure time activities that help them reduce the feeling of conflict and stress in comparison to women with low income (Danziger, Corcoran, Danziger, Heflin, Kalil, Levin, Rosen, & Tolman, 2000).

Another research study indicated findings similar to those of the previous research. The research found that the economic resource contributes directly to the reduction of the feeling of stress caused by the work among the working mothers. The research maintained that the economic resource at the working mother's disposal gives her a feeling of confidence and prevents the pressures and conflicts created in the work from developing into a feeling of stress (Kulik & Liberman, 2016).

The research study of Kasinitz and Rosenberg (1996) found that women in a high economic situation tended to experience less loneliness than did women in a low economic situation.

The importance of the economic resource was found to be most meaningful among the population of single-parent mothers, a population that in recent years is growing around the world. A research study that examined the risk factors for depression among single-parent and married mothers who live in South Korea found that the single-parent mothers tend more to experience economic difficulty, parental stress, and poor mental health than married mothers. The economic pressure they experience was found to be more significant than the tension and psychological stress among the married mothers. The single-parent mothers, mainly those of young children, face a restricted range of employment possibilities, regardless of their level of education, and they tend to search for hourly or temporary positions because of the great responsibility to earn a livelihood alongside the requirement to be considerably present in the raising of the children. One of the components of the economic difficulty single parent mothers face is the absence of social support (the existence of social and family relationships at a low frequency), which increases the severity of their and their children's different problems. The economic stress that single-parent families experience has a significant influence on the wellness and the likelihood for depression as well as the wellness and physical health. The families note an economic barrier as a main reason for the turning for help and medical care (Kim, Choi, & Kim, 2018).

From the 1970s onwards, different theories attempted to shift the topic of the economic resource as a significant factor that influences the wellness and even as a significant factor in the development of mental illnesses and proposed medical, psychiatric, and psychological perspectives on the mental health. On the basis of many research studies in recent years, the economic factor was again revealed as having significant influence on the wellness, when until now attempts were made to camouflage this factor (Macintyre et al., 2018).

Aside from the economic resource, there are other significant resources, personal and environmental, that facilitate the reduction of the sense of stress in the mother and the increase of her sense of wellness, such as the health resource, which enables the mother personal wellness because of optimal physical and social functioning (Danziger et al., 2000; Olson & Pavetti, 1996). The educational resource was found to be more meaningful in the reduction of the feeling of stress among women than among men (Ross & Van Willigen, 1997), while the social resource, which is classified as an environmental resource, is a meaningful and central resource in different models that address the feeling of stress (Ayman & Antani, 2008).

Each one of the personal or environmental resources alone was found to facilitate the reduction of the sense of conflict and stress. However, many research studies have found that the economic resource is more significant, in comparison to the other resources, and that the individual who has at her disposal a combination of resources, such as an economic resource in addition to social and family resources, benefits significantly in the reduction of the sense of conflict and sense of stress, in comparison to the contribution of the sole resource. When the working mother's inventory of resources empties, she experiences a sense of stress in each one of the roles she undertakes and her personal wellbeing is harmed (Kulik & Liberman, 2016).

Furthermore, it was argued that there is a relationship between the number of resources at the mother's disposal and the number of roles she assumes upon herself. In other words, the level of mental resilience caused by the inventory of resources at her disposal enables her to take upon herself a greater number of roles in comparison to the mother with sparse resources (Kulik & Liberman, 2016).

According to the research studies, the argument was posited that mothers who have at their disposal many resources in one field, for example, the economic resource, will have many resources in another area, for example the educational resource, the health resource, and so on. This assertion has implications on the feeling of stress that mothers lacking in resources experience. A mother who is poor in resources in one field, such as the economic field, will also be poor in resources in another field, for example, an educational resource.

Therefore, the personal resilience against pressures and tensions caused by the conflict of the roles will be lower. The mother's weakness from the lack of resource in one field leads her to another weakness that derives from the lack of resource in another field. The weakness that accumulates from the lack of resources presents the mother with tremendous difficulties, a feeling of conflict and repression, and difficulty strengthening herself and choosing additional resources. The research findings indicate the circular relationship between the lack of resources and the feeling of stress that prevents mothers lacking in resources from filling their resources and thus they have a high chance to be harmed by the multiplicity of the roles. Without impeding resources, the working mother experiences conflict and an increasing sense of stress (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2006).

The transition to parenthood usually begins with the desire to create a child. As a rule, the decision to conceive a child is determined by motives, some of which may not be realized by the couple, and are often different for men and women. It is necessary to distinguish the constructive motives for the appearance of the child from the destructive ones (Hristoova, 2020).

The challenges the mother today must deal with are more numerous and complicated than ever before. Research studies indicate unequivocally the importance of the mother's wellness to her functioning in general and to her parental functioning in particular and to the meaning of the economic resource in the overall constellation for the strengthening of the mother's mental and physical health. Especially in our time, when almost everything is accessible and developed, it is necessary to refer to and act for the change of the social awareness of the challenges with which the mother deals and the solutions that support her and to broaden the economic resource at her disposal, which will make possible the presence of additional resources that contribute to the increase of her wellness.

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