

The New Families Study

It is now well recognized that experiences in the first few years of life play a vital role in promoting positive long-term outcomes. The New Families Study integrates physiological, cognitive and relationship perspectives in order to explain the influences of both mothers and fathers on their infants' social, cognitive and behavioural development.

The study will track 400 new families the UK, USA and the Netherlands. Parents will be seen at 4 time-points (at hospital just before their babies are born and at home when their babies are 4-months, 14-months and 24-months. Both mothers and fathers will be filmed interacting with their infant at each of these home visits in order to construct a detailed picture of the quality of parent-infant interaction. Both parents and their infants will also complete tasks designed to measure impulse control, cognitive flexibility and the ability to hold information in mind (i.e., working memory). Saliva samples will also be taken to assess infant's exposure to stress both pre- and post-birth (via assays of the stress hormone cortisol).

This work builds on earlier work by Claire Hughes and her team examining the importance of early self-control for children's social and academic outcomes. Key new features of the current study are the inclusion of: (i) fathers as well as mothers; (ii) both physiological and cognitive measures; and (iii) a cultural perspective on the transition to parenthood.

The rich dataset that will be gathered for this study will provide an ideal platform for graduate research. As well as working on the study, Sarah Foley will be studying for a PhD (on how contrasts between parental expectations and experiences can contribute to family stress). If you have funding and are interested in joining this study as a PhD student, please send Professor Claire Hughes your CV along with paragraph describing what you might be interested in investigating.