

National
Organization of
Mothers
Of
Twins
Clubs, Inc.

SUBJECT: SURVEY FOR MOTHERS OF MULTIPLES
(STRESS)
RESEARCHER: Joan Garfield and Kathryn Hagen
Mothers of Twins
DATE: 1986

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to find out how mothers viewed the blessings and stresses of having and raising multiples.

METHOD: A total of 1,499 surveys were received.

Of the mothers who responded, most had boy/girl twins (23%), followed by fraternal boys (20%), identical girls (19%), identical boys (18%) and fraternal girls (16%). Forty-six (3%) of the mothers had triplets or quadruplets. The ages of multiple children ranged from newborn to 44 years with more twins being in the younger age categories. Most of the mothers (62%) delivered multiples before their due date which ranged from 1 to 15 weeks premature. Twenty-seven percent delivered full-term babies, and 153 mothers (10%) delivered 1 to 37 days after their due date. Several mothers had health problems at the time of the birth or soon after: 14% had toxemia, 8% had hemorrhaging and 16% had other health problems.

Of the health problems experienced by multiples at or soon after their birth, the most common were jaundice (39%) and respiratory problems (22%). Twelve percent had colic, 5% had heart problems and 3% had low blood sugar. Sixteen percent of the multiples had health problems that persisted after the first few weeks.

Most of the mothers surveyed (54%) had children older than their multiples, and 16% had given birth to children after having had their multiples. The ages of mothers surveyed ranged from 19 to 69, with most mothers being less than 40 (88%). Most of the mothers were currently married (94%) although a higher percentage (97%) were married at the time they gave birth to multiples. Forty-eight percent of the mothers were full-time homemakers when they gave birth, 13% were working part-time, and 34% worked full-time. Of the mothers that were employed, 27% did not, or had not yet, returned to work.

Of the fourteen factors ranked according to stress by mothers surveyed, the question receiving the highest stress rating was "lack of sleep," with an average rating of 3.85 (on a scale of 1=not stressful to 5=very stressful). The next highest ranked stresses were: amount of work required, limited time for yourself, limited time for your husband, and difficulty maintaining a clean house. The items ranked as causing the least amount of stress were: problems at the multiples' school, jealousy between multiples, and tension in the marriage. It is important to note that these rankings are based on the averages for 1,499 mothers, and that each of the 14 causes of stress received ratings at all levels. This range of responses also showed up in the comments of individual mothers. While some wrote that having and raising multiples was so stressful their marriages had broken up, others wrote that the bonding with two beautiful babies to cuddle and love balanced out the problems.

Mothers in the "high stress" group had fewer full-term pregnancies, more infants who had persistent health problems, and more children in the family older than the multiples. Many individual comments attested to the stress resulting from having older children and not having enough time to spend with them alone. These mothers also tended to stay home and not return to work if they had been working previously outside the home. More mothers of triplets and quadruplets tended to have high stress ratings, and mothers with children aged 2 to 5 had the highest stress ratings according to survey responses. No significant differences were found in stress ratings between mothers of different types of twins: identical vs. fraternal, or boys vs. girls vs. boy/girl.

The most frequent and vehement comments from mothers were related to the difficult adjustment of older singletons when multiples entered the family. Some mothers felt stressed by the older siblings' jealousy, many were concerned about the limited time for the older child or children, and one mother believed that her older child "had to grow up too fast." These comments supported the higher overall stress scores found in mothers with older children.

Although a few mothers listed "attention from strangers" as a blessing, this attention was the second frequent type of stress commented on. Some mothers found attention in general to be stressful, but many reported particular concern with strangers who believed they had a "right" to comment upon the multiples' likenesses and differences with the child present. Other respondents were tired of strangers' personal questions about the pregnancy and birth of their multiples and even about the future family planning.

The difficulty getting out with younger multiples was also a problem frequently cited. Keeping control of two or more same-aged children while shopping was listed as very stressful and some mothers had difficulty finding access into public buildings with stairs when using a heavy double-stroller. Mothers of triplets and quadruplets found particularly stressful and one mother of quads commented "they don't make strollers for four."

The discipline of multiples, scarcity of good daycare for multiple infants and toddlers, and frustration with double, triple or quadruple illnesses were also addressed in the comments of mothers surveyed. Also mentioned was the conflict felt by mothers in trying to be "fair" by treating multiples equally and at the same time supporting their individuality.
