

PARENTS' LOVING FEELING ISN'T LOST ON CHILDREN

by Marilyn Elias, USA Today

Parents who hug, kiss and cuddle their young children are helping ensure closer, happier social ties when their kids grow up, a new study says.

Fathers have just as much influence as mothers, finds the 36-year study — the longest ever to trace how parental warmth in early childhood affects adult social development.

Parents should feel heartened by the findings, say Harvard university psychologist, Carol Franz, lead author.

“Obviously, a lot of other things enter into how a child turns out, but parents can have this influence,” she says.

Her results, developed with Boston University psychologist David C. McClelland and psychologist Joel Weinberg of Adelphi University, are in the April Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

The team interviewed 379 Boston-area moms with 5-year-olds in 1951, and followed up with 94 of the kids 36 years latter.

Among findings:

- < Physical affection and warmth toward kids strongly predicted closer marriages, and friendships. Also predicted: better mental health, more work success.
- < Warmth from Mom had no greater long-term value than an affectionate relationship with Dad. Those who got it from both parents tended to be best adjusted of all, but the significant difference was between mid-lifers who had no warm parent and those who had at least one.

The results are part of a growing pool of evidence that fathers play a more important part in shaping children than traditionally thought. “In a way, it takes all the load off mother,” Franz says.

Two likely causes for the link between affection and later social skill, she says:

- <**modeling** - Children imitate nurturing they've seen their parents do; this fosters their warm relations as adults.
- <**attachment** - Kids with affectionate parents develop a stronger sense of internal security; that enables them to socially engage other people rather than withdraw.