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**New Study Shows the Impact of Birth Order on Maternal Solicitousness Toward GI Symptoms Among Children**

***Research Points to Greater Parental Protectiveness for Children of Mothers with Irritable Bowel Syndrome***

**HONOLULU, October 31, 2005** -- New research presented at the 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Gastroenterology suggests that birth order impacts child perceptions of maternal solicitousness toward GI symptoms, particularly in families where the mother has Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Researcher Rona L. Levy, Ph.D. and colleagues at the University of Washington and other institutions looked at whether parents respond differently to GI symptoms as a function of the child's birth order, and whether this relationship differs by maternal IBS status.

Researchers looked at survey data from 342 children of 228 mothers, 112 of whom had a diagnosis of IBS. The children completed the child-report version of the Adult Responses to Children's Symptoms Inventory (Van Slyke & Walker, 2004), which measures parental solicitousness. Items such as "When you have a stomach ache, how often do your parents let you stay home from school?" were designed to assess protectiveness.

Child perceptions of parental protectiveness differed as a function of birth order, with second and third born children perceiving greater parental protectiveness than did only children. This effect was apparent for children of mothers with IBS, but not for children of mothers who did not have IBS.

"I think parents do protect first-borns, but there is always the phenomenon of the family baby. In my personal experience, my youngest kid often calls out for more being taken care of, and I also think I always see her as younger - at every age - than her sisters were at the same age," commented Dr. Levy.

Earlier research by Dr. Levy published in 2004 in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology* found that children whose mothers made solicitous responses to illness complaints independently reported more severe stomach aches, and they had more school absences for stomach aches, but solicitous behavior did not significantly impact non-GI symptom reporting, clinic visits or school absences.<sup>1</sup>

Given the established relationship between parental solicitousness and child disability, later born children may be at increased risk for such negative outcomes, particularly later born children of IBS mothers.

According to Shelby L. Langer, Ph.D., the lead author, "Future research is needed to examine how parents respond to children in a more 'protective' but potentially problematic way. Well-intended protectiveness may actually reinforce illness behavior rather than wellness behavior. As a result, children could miss more school or report more symptoms."

### ***About the American College of Gastroenterology***

The ACG was formed in 1932 to advance the scientific study and medical treatment of disorders of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The College promotes the highest standards in medical education and is guided by its commitment to meeting the needs of clinical gastroenterology practitioners. Consumers can get more information on GI diseases through the following ACG-sponsored programs:

- 1-800-978-7666 (free brochures on common GI disorders, including ulcer, colon cancer, gallstones, and liver disease)
- 1-866-IBS-RELIEF and [www.ibsrelief.org](http://www.ibsrelief.org) (free educational materials)
- 1-800-HRT-BURN (free brochure and video on heartburn and GERD)
- [www.acg.gi.org](http://www.acg.gi.org) (ACG's Web site)

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<sup>1</sup> *AmJGastroenterol* 2004;99:1-10