

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

The worst place to be a mother



This is not a word for word transcript.

- Jen:** Hello and welcome to another edition of 6 minute English. My name is Jennifer.
- Neil:** And I'm Neil.
- Jen:** And today we are going to talk about research that looks at conditions for mothers in different countries.
- Neil:** I've heard that in Brazil they say that "to be a mother is to suffer in paradise" because motherhood is rewarding due to the love between child and mother but it's not an easy job.
- Jen:** Well, according to a report by the charity Save the Children, in some countries motherhood seems to be more challenging than in others. They compared conditions for mothers in 165 countries.
- Neil:** And what sort of factors did they take into account when ranking these countries, Jen?
- Jen:** Health, education, social status and nutrition. These were the factors researchers investigated when compiling this list.
- Neil:** But before we talk about Save the Children's conclusions, let's start with a question for our listeners about mothers and for me too.
- Jen:** Well Neil, it's about the oldest woman to give birth. It's a Spanish woman and it happened in 2006. How old was she?
- a) 58 years old
 - b) 66 years old or
 - c) 72 years old ?
- Neil:** 72?! Now you're pushing it, I think. It has to be... a) 58. That sounds almost reasonable considering advancements in medicine...
- Jen:** We'll hear the answer at the end of the programme. Now, back to our story about mothers. A huge problem that's highlighted in the report is nutrition or malnutrition.
- Neil:** Women need to eat properly to give birth to healthy children.

Jen: Let's listen to the first part of the report by the BBC's Mike Wooldridge to hear about the problem of malnutrition. See if you can hear which word is used to mean 'to stop someone from growing'.

BBC correspondent Mike Wooldridge:

*This year's report highlights the major impact nutrition has on the welfare of mothers and children - in particular, the chronic malnutrition that **undermines** physical and mental growth producing **stunting** and what Save the Children calls the **vicious cycle** of mothers **stunted** in childhood who go on to give birth to underweight and vulnerable babies.*

Neil: So the reporter says that malnutrition produces **stunting**, which means that people don't grow properly. Here the reporter says malnutrition **undermines** physical and mental growth.

Jen: That's right; because mothers are **stunted** in childhood they have children who are underweight and vulnerable. And it creates what the reporter calls **a vicious cycle**.

Neil: **A vicious cycle** means that the problem keeps repeating itself... mothers suffer from malnutrition, so their children suffer from malnutrition ... then these children grow up and have children who are also vulnerable ... and it goes on and on.

Jen: And many of the countries at the bottom of the Save the Children's list – the worst places to live for mothers – are facing **a food crisis**.

Neil: So which country faces lack of foodstuff and, according to the Save the Children report, was the worst for mothers, Jen?

Jen: The next part of the report tells us which country is at the bottom of the index and also which one has moved up one position. See if you can hear what has happened to it.

BBC correspondent Mike Wooldridge:

*Food emergencies compound the impact, and Niger **is at the epicentre** of the emergency currently developing in the Sahel. After two years at the bottom of the index Afghanistan has moved up one position – partly, Save the Children says, because it's invested in more **frontline health workers**.*

Neil: We hear that Niger is **at the epicentre** of the food emergency, it means that it is in the centre, the main position, of an area where lack of food is dramatic.

Jen: Well, the report also says that Afghanistan was the last one in the list for two years but is no longer the worst place to be a mother. Because they've invested more into **frontline health workers**.

Neil: These are medical workers like doctors and dentists. They made conditions for mothers a little bit better.

Jen: Sometimes simple measures can improve the lives of mothers and their children. One example is given in the next section of the report. Let's hear it.

BBC correspondent Mike Wooldridge:

*The agency says the simple measure of supporting more mothers **to breastfeed** could save a million children's lives a year. Save the Children identifies Norway as the best place to be a mother.*

Jen: A simple way of saving children is by helping more mothers to provide milk from their breast to their babies. Breast milk is known to be very nutritious for children. **Breastfeeding** can save the lives of a million children a year.

Neil: And the report also says that Norway is the best place to be a mother. Very different realities there. Well Jen, we are running out of time and I'd like to have the result of the quiz please.

Jen: It was about the oldest woman to give birth. It's a Spanish woman and it happened in 2006. How old was she?
a) 58 years old
b) 66 years old or
c) 72 years old ?

Neil: I said it was a) 58.

Jen: And you were actually wrong! It's b) 66 years old and the oldest mother, according to the Guinness Book of Record is Maria del Carmen Bousada Lara, who gave birth by caesarean section to twin boys, aged 66 years 358 days at the Sant Pau hospital, Barcelona, Spain. That was on the 29th of December 2006. And Maria received IVF treatment in America.

Neil: Well, you get some right and you get some wrong! And I got that wrong so ... before we finish, let's hear the words from today's programme one more time.

to undermine
to stunt
a vicious cycle
a food crisis
to be at the epicentre of something
a frontline health worker
to breastfeed

Jen: That's all from us for this week. Goodbye!

Neil: Goodbye!

Vocabulary and definitions

to undermine	to weaken or affect in a negative way
to stunt	to stop something growing
a vicious cycle	a bad situation that repeats itself
a food crisis	a serious lack of food
to be at the epicentre (of something)	to be at the centre, at the most important position (of something)
a frontline health worker	a health worker that is in direct contact with the people he/she is helping
to breastfeed	to provide natural milk produced by a mother's mammary glands on her chest

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