



Caring for Caregivers

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March 2024

Caregivers are crucial

Babies and toddlers are shaped by their experiences – and those experiences are shaped by their caregivers.



People before parents

We need a person-first approach towards parents and caregivers. During this period parents are exposed to increased stress and vulnerability

Severe stress includes:

1. Environmental stress from unsafe neighbourhoods, poverty, and conflict,
2. Previous trauma and adverse early childhood experiences,
3. Daily pressure from pregnancy, birth, and parenting.



Parenting has radically changed



Double time

The amount of time parents spend caring for their children has more than doubled in many countries.

Within the same period more women have entered the workforce.



Parenting as a verb

The use of parenting as a verb gained popularity in the 1970s, when many women were joining the formal workforce.

There were new expectations on parents to be able to balance both.



A team of two

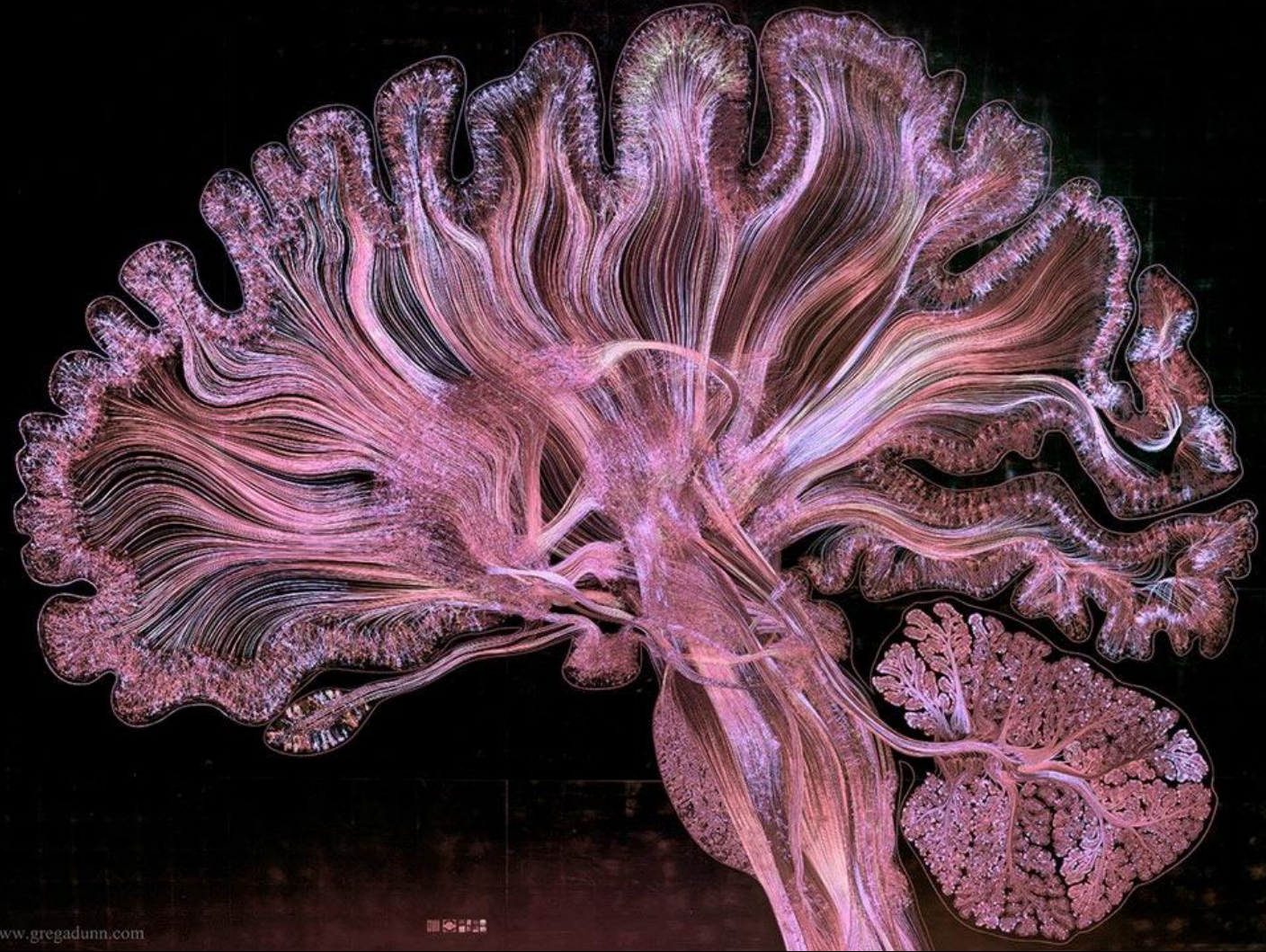
It is only in recent history that the idea of two caregivers is considered sufficient for raising a child.

With new families living further away from traditional support networks, who is caring for caregivers?



Photo credit: Linda Bournane Engelberth and Valentina Sinis/Unicef

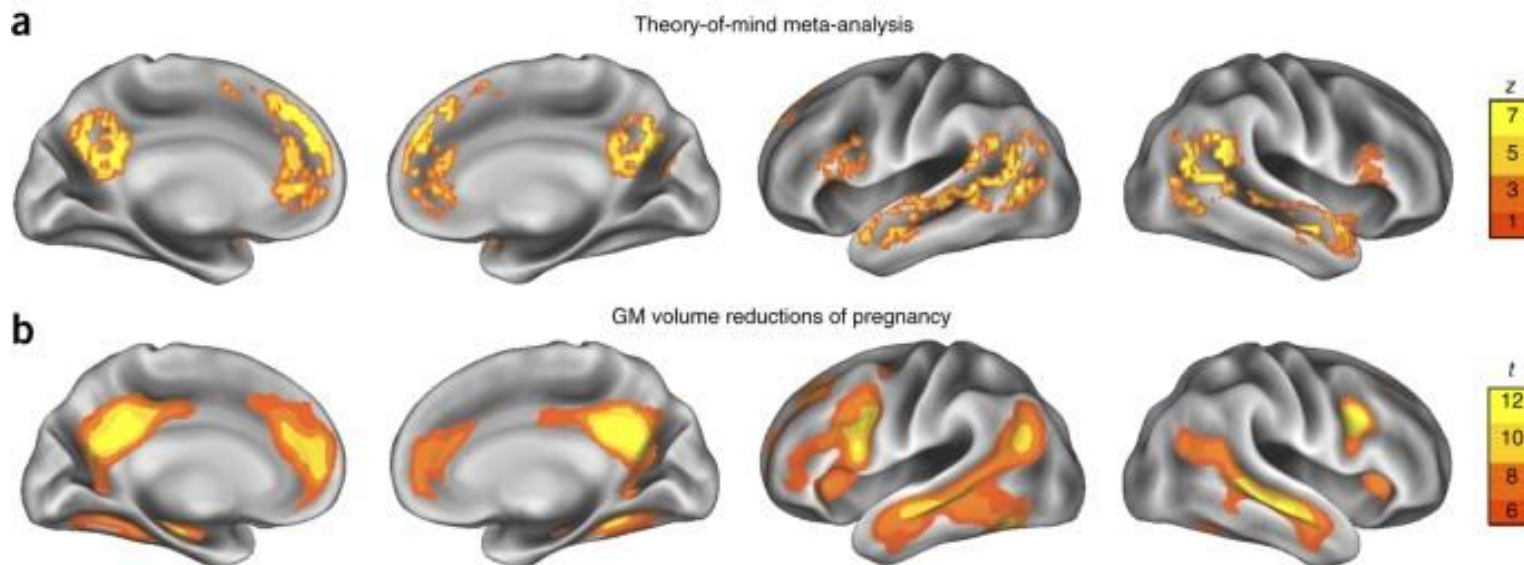
Parenthood reshapes brains and bodies



Brain changes impacts parents' sense of self

New research on the brains of pregnant women indicates considerable brain volume loss. The areas of the brain that shrank the most were those involved in **social cognition**, the ability to figure out what **someone else is thinking and feeling**.

These changes strengthen caregiving capabilities.



What if we agreed that when a baby is born, a parent is also born?

**How would it help us reimagine what parents need?
How might it change how we care for them?**



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3 leading examples from Africa

Featured in Early Childhood
Matters



Photo credit: TRECC

Addis puts family wellbeing at the top of the agenda

A city-wide initiative is supporting parents through parent coaching, economic opportunities and healthy public spaces.



“My hope is for Addis to be the best city in Africa to raise a child and to be a mother”

Adanech Abiebie, Mayor of Addis Ababa



Photo credit: Addis Ababa Municipality

StrongMinds supports women experiencing depression

Community-based networks matter for mothers' mental health

1 in 3 mothers experience clinically significant anxiety or depression during pregnancy or in the first few years of her child's life (Shuman et al., 2022).

The StrongMinds group therapy model provides direct care to women who are living with depression in low-resource communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

When a woman recovers from depression, her entire ecosystem flourishes – particularly her children, who enjoy better health and education outcomes as a result.



Kidogo gives parents the option of quality affordable childcare

The Kenyan franchise model benefits children, caregivers and Mamapreneurs

[Kidogo](#) emerged in response to demand from mothers for childcare that is high quality yet affordable. Through a social franchising approach, it trains daycare operators and certifies them as Kidogo “Mamapreneurs”.

After the initial training, Kidogo provides continuous coaching, mentoring and support to Mamapreneurs to ensure that they consistently meet the franchise’s quality standards.



Photo: Daniel Macharia, Kidogo

Early Childhood Matters 2023

We need to reimagine support for caregivers.

The 24 articles from over 30 authors in this journal offer insight from diverse traditions, policies, programmes, and people. Together, they show why we need a person-first approach to caregiving and how we can get there, so that caregivers, children and entire communities flourish.

About *Early Childhood Matters*

Early Childhood Matters is the annual journal of the [Van Leer Foundation](#). It has been published and distributed free of charge since 1998. *Early Childhood Matters* elevates key issues, spreads awareness of promising solutions to support holistic child development, and explores the elements needed to take those solutions to scale.

Early Childhood Matters

What does wellbeing
mean for parents and
other caregivers?

