

RAISING KIDS

Older Dads May Raise Smarter, Geekier Kids

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Men who are living the bachelor life longer may be onto something. More men, especially college educated ones, are waiting longer to have kids, and these older men are raising smarter, more successful kids overall.

According to a recent Pew Research Center analysis of data from the National Center for Health Statistics, only 14 percent of men with a bachelor's degree or more had their first child before they were 25. In addition, from 1980 to 2014, there has been a 58 percent increase in the number of men age 35 and older having a baby. This trend is leading to a whole generation of children with older fathers. Although there may be some concerns about fathering children at an older age, a new study from New King's College London published in *Translational Psychiatry* suggests that sons of older fathers are smarter, more focused on their interests, and less concerned about fitting in with their peers.

Researchers from King's College London and The Seaver Autism Center for Research and Treatment at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in the United States collected behavioral and cognitive data from 15,000 male twins in the United Kingdom who were part of the Twins Early Development Study (TEDS). When the twins were 12 years old, they took online tests that measured 'geek-like' traits such as non-verbal IQ, strong focus on the subject of interest, and levels of social detachment. Parents were also asked whether their child cares about how they are perceived by their peers and if they have any interests that take up a large amount of their time.



Using all of that information, the researchers computed a ‘geek index’ for every child in the study. Overall, higher geek index scores were reported in the sons of older fathers. This pattern even showed up after controlling for the parent’s social and economic status, qualifications, and employment. In addition, they found that ‘geekier’ children do better in school exams, particularly in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

The study shows how there may be some clear benefits to having an older father that positively impact a child’s education and career. One likely reason for this correlation, according to the experts involved in the study, is that older fathers are more likely to be established in their careers and have higher socioeconomic status than younger fathers just starting out in their career. Therefore, the children with older fathers could be raised in a more enriched environment with a stronger focus on academics and career building. These children would also tend to have access to better schools with extensive resources and opportunities.

But what about the risks of fathering a child later in life? Since men do not go through menopause, they can have a child until they are using a cane. Just look at Mick Jagger, who had his eighth child at the age of 73. According to Men’s Health, in most cases age is not really a problem for men. The majority of older dads do not have fertility problems and are able to father babies without serious physical or developmental problems.

However, there are some risks involved with being an older daddy. As men age, there is a greater chance of producing sperm with mutations, which can pass along health problems to the child or make it harder to conceive. A study in the American Journal of Epidemiology found that women with partners age 35 and older were 27 percent more likely to have a miscarriage than those with partners 25 or younger. Previous research also has shown that children of older fathers are at a higher risk of autism and schizophrenia.

So, what does this mean for women, since our biological clocks are ticking and we do not want to wait too long to have kids? On one hand, it may not be a good idea to pressure our significant others to have kids right away. Let them turn a little gray before taking on the huge role of fatherhood. On the other hand, there are some possible health risks with waiting too long to have kids. Or maybe women should just try and look for older men to be the father of their children? There is no right or wrong path to take, and you certainly can’t plan love. But it’s always interesting to have this knowledge in our back pocket to see if it really works.



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