**Parenthood the key to living longer: study**

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Being a parent to a young child may sometimes feel like it's sending you to an early grave but your children could be the key to living longer, new research suggests.

A Swedish study published in the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health found parenthood is associated with a longer life than childlessness, particularly in older age, when health and capacity start to decline.

The difference in life expectancy may be as much as two years.

Researchers at the Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm tracked the life span of more than 1.4 million men and women over 60 living in Sweden and born between 1911-1925.

Not unexpectedly, the risk of death rose with increasing age, irrespective of whether the individuals were parents or not.

But after taking account of influential factors, such as educational attainment, the risk of death was lower among those who had had at least one child compared to childless men and women.

At 60, the difference in life expectancy between those with children and those without was almost two years for men and 1.5 years for women.

Sixty-year-old men with children could expect to live for another 20.2 years, whereas men without children could expect a further 18.4 years – an almost two-year difference.

Meanwhile, women aged 60 with children could expect to live a further 24.6 years, whereas those without could expect another 23.1 years – a difference of 1.5 years.

At the age of 80, men with children could expect to live a further 7.7 years, while those without could live seven years.

For women aged 80 with children, they could expect a further 9.5 years, while those without could live a further 8.9 years.

Both married and non-married couples benefited from having children, though unmarried people – and particularly men- seemed to enjoy a stronger benefit, the research also showed.

This may suggest that unmarried people rely on their children more for support, whereas married couples are supported by their partner.

The researchers, led by Dr Karin Modig, say the findings highlight a need for greater support for older people without children.

"Our finding that the association grew stronger when parents became older is further in agreement with research suggesting that childless people face support deficits only towards the end of life," the authors said.