**Being a parent could ADD two years to your life: Support offspring provide in later years thought to help increase life expectancy**

* **Swedish health experts found people with children tended to live longer**
* **The suspected reason is children provide vital support when parents are older**
* **At 60 years old, fathers can expect to survive another 20.2 years**
* **Mothers at 60 can be expected to live a further 24.6 years**

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New parents take heart – that baby keeping you up all night could be helping to extend your life.

The claims may be met with scepticism by virtually everyone who has experienced the sleep-deprivation and stress of bringing up a child, but the scientists behind the major study are adamant that parenthood may well be the secret to a longer life.

The findings apply to men and women, the researchers claim, although fathers saw their life expectancy increase more than mothers.

Swedish health experts found that support from adult children for ageing parents can help them live longer

Swedish health experts tracked 1.5million people and found those who had at least one child had a greater life expectancy. The reason, they suspect, is that children go on to provide vital support to their parents when they get older.

Writing in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, the researchers said: ‘Support from adult children to their ageing parents may be of importance for parental health and longevity.’

At 60 years old, fathers can expect to survive another 20.2 years – two years longer than men with no children, the researchers found. Meanwhile, mothers at 60 can expect to live a further 24.6 years, whereas childless women can expect another 23.1 years – a difference of 18 months.

The scientists, from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, found the older people get, the greater the benefits of having a child.

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

Mothers at aged 60 could be expected to live for a further 24.6 years, while father could expect another 20.2 years

Mothers at the age of 80 could expect a further 9.5 years, while those without would survive an average of only 8.9 years.

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

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

The team found that having a girl had no extra benefit than having a boy, although previous studies have suggested that girls are more likely to help their ailing parents than their brothers.

The latest research suggests that boys may be just as likely to offer support as girls, including in helping parents navigate the social care system.

The study suggested that men seem to benefit more from parenthood than women

In contrast, people who do not have children struggle more for the kind of social support offered by having offspring. Other explanations for the findings could include the fact that parents have healthier lifestyles than those who are childless, the researchers said.

Parents are also thought to take more responsibility for their health and take fewer risks in life.

Biological factors may also play a role, with previous research suggesting that being pregnant protects women against breast cancer, womb cancer and ovarian cancer. But the researchers said that because men seem to benefit more from parenthood than women, social aspects may be more important than the biological benefits.

The team concluded: ‘Having children is associated with increased longevity, particularly in an absolute sense in old age.

‘That the association increased with parents’ age was somewhat stronger for the non-married may suggest that social support is a possible explanation.’

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