Parenthood can help you live longer in older age, research suggests

* View more sharing options

 This article is **2 months old**

Shares

**947**

[Comments](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/mar/14/parenthood-can-help-you-live-longer-in-older-age-research-suggests" \l "comments)

**[402](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/mar/14/parenthood-can-help-you-live-longer-in-older-age-research-suggests" \l "comments)**

[**Nicola Davis**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/nicola-davis)

Tuesday 14 March 2017 06.00 GMT

Life expectancy of men and women aged between 60 and 100 and having children better than those with no children, study finds

Parenthood could boost your chances of living longer in your later years, according researchers who believe the effect could be down to children helping with care and support.

While previous research has shown that adults with children live longer than those without, the new study unpicks how the effect plays out in older age.

“We started first at the age of 60 and we looked all the way up to the age of 100,” said Karin Modig, a co-author of the research from Sweden’s Karolinska Institute.

Modig and colleagues used national registry data to follow almost 1.5 million Swedes born between 1911 and 1925 as they aged. The team found that while the risk of death increased with age for all adults, having children was linked to greater longevity. The results are published in the [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](http://jech.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/jech-2016-207857).

At the age of 60, men who had children had almost two years more on their remaining life expectancy than those without, at 20.2 and 18.4 years respectively. A similar trend was seen for women aged 60, with life expectancies of 23.1 years for those without children and 24.6 years for mothers.

By contrast at the age of 80, parents had a life expectancy of 7.7 years for men and 9.5 years for women, compared to 7 years for men without children and 8.9 years for women without children.

The team also looked at the risk of dying within a year for each age, taking into account factors such as education and marital status.

The findings reveal that the benefits of having children became more pronounced with age – an effect that was greater for men than women. Furthermore, the team found that having children had a stronger impact on the longevity of men who were not married than those with a spouse.

The researchers suggest that could be because unmarried men are more dependant on their children for support than men who are married, adding that previous research has suggested that men benefit more from marriage when it comes to survival than women do, possibly explaining why the effect is not seen for women.

Unlike some previous research, the authors found that the sex of the child had no influence on their parent’s longevity – however the finding was based only on families with one child. “Perhaps being the only child is related to a greater responsibility of parents, reducing the difference in the amount of help given by sons and daughters,” they write.

While it is not clear why having children is linked to a longer life, the researchers suggest it might be down to children helping to look after their ageing parents, be it through physical care, emotional support or even arguing for better treatment.

However there are other explanations, including that adults with children might have healthier lifestyles, or that there are other factors that could decrease an individual’s chances of having children and raise their risk of death.

But while having children might boost the years left on your clock, Modig says it is far from the only factor influencing longevity.

“In terms of all other causes that would affect your death risk in these old ages, having a child is not among the greatest ones,” she said. “But it is still a 1.5% difference [for 90-year-old men] which is still substantial.”