

CHILDREN CAN DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH

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Mothers who feel their children are giving them gray hairs may not be far from the truth, according to research in the journal *Science* (December, 1999). Researchers have tied longer life spans to fewer offspring and delayed reproduction in fruit flies. By studying the biological impact, the article supports theories that connect fertility to early aging in humans.

Demographic statistics show such a correlation. Women who have children at a young age - and have more of them - die earlier than women who delay childbearing do. Researchers have long discounted this information, however, because of socio-economic distortions. As wealthier women tend to reproduce later, their longer lives have been attributed to access to superior health care.

In the case of humans, scientists have also had trouble separating the environmental from the biological impact of reproduction. It may be, researchers argue, that children age their parents because of added stress, less sleep, or increased exposure to infectious diseases like the common cold. Because fruit flies are not subject to these complications, the article suggests, aging acceleration occurs independent of environmental factors.

This study also supports a controversial report showing a link between reproduction and aging in the Western Society. The authors of the report performed a historical analysis of the upper echelons of Western Society to screen out socio-economic diversity. They found that the more children a woman bears, and the earlier she bears them, the shorter her life span, regardless of her socioeconomic status. Females who do not have offspring until the age of 40 have a better chance of becoming centenarians, said the authors, while women who reproduce in their adolescent years are far more likely to die before the age of 20. Scientists theorize that fertility has the impact of diverting bodily resources used to maintain and repair cells. The more years a woman has to concentrate on her own biological upkeep, the healthier she will be in the long run.

While human parents may feel themselves getting older by the minute as they care for their brood, the fruit fly study argues that the aging effect is not immediate. The flies showed no health or mortality differences until later in life. For humans, that means that only as we enter our retirement years is the full impact of having children manifested.