Home | News | Back to article

Children of older dads pay IQ price

11 March 2009

Magazine issue 2699. Subscribe and get 4 free issues.

ADVERTISEMENT

UNLIKE women, men can continue having children into old age, but those kids may pay a small price - in intelligence.

Children born to older dads score lower on average on a range of tests, including concentration, memory, reasoning and reading, while the kids of older mothers score higher than those of younger mothers. That's according to John McGrath at the University of Queensland in St Lucia, Australia, and colleagues, who analysed data on more than 33,000 US children taken at 8 months and again at 4 years and 7 years (*PLoS Medicine*, DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1000040).

One might expect the offspring of older parents to benefit from good nurturing and better opportunities, leading to higher IQ, says McGrath. "That is exactly what we find for mothers - but exactly what we don't find for dads." The differences in test scores were small, however, amounting to 2 IQ points for the child of a 20-year-old father compared with that of a 50-year-old.

Accumulations of genetic errors in sperm-producing cells may explain these results, says McGrath, as well as findings of an increased risk of schizophrenia, autism and bipolar disorder in the children of older dads.

New Scientist

Not just a website!

Subscribe to New Scientist and get:

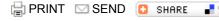
New Scientist magazine delivered to your door

Unlimited online access to articles from over 500 back issues

Subscribe Now and Save

If you would like **to reuse any content** from New Scientist, either in print or online, please **contact the syndication** department first for permission. New Scientist does not own rights to photos, but there are a variety of licensing options available for use of articles and graphics we own the copyright to.

Back to article



ADVERTISEMENT