

Children Born to Young Women Live Longer than Most, Chicago Actuaries Learn

The chances of living to age 100 and beyond nearly double for those born to a woman before her 25th birthday, according to a recent study that investigated predictors of exceptional human longevity. The findings were presented at the March 14 meeting of the Chicago Actuarial Association (CAA), suggesting that the age when a woman gives birth has a significant impact on how long her child will live.

Previous research indicated that first-born children, especially daughters, are three times more likely to survive to age 100, but the significance of this birth order effect was unclear. Researchers have now found that it is the young age of the mother which explains why first-born children could celebrate their 100th birthday more often than others.

“The protective effect of being born first is driven mostly by the young maternal age at a person’s birth,” explained Dr. Leonid Gavrilov, researcher at the Center on Aging and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. “As a major predictor of human longevity, this finding may have important social implications because many women postpone their childbearing to later ages because of career demands.”

Previous research by the Society of Actuaries (SOA) and the Center on Aging indicated that predictors for exceptional human longevity include birth order, place of birth and early-life living conditions.

Using the U.S. Censuses, the Social Security Administration database, genealogical records and complete family histories, nearly 200 validated centenarians born in the U.S. from 1890-1893 were identified. Their complete family history was reconstructed using records and supplementary data resources in order to identify predictors of exceptional human longevity.

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“This research helps us better understand the predictors of longevity and quantify the implications on society and business,” said Thomas Edwalds, Fellow of the SOA and President-Elect of the CAA. “This research illustrates that studies on human longevity could be modernized and advanced further by using new computerized data resources such as genealogies.”

The Chicago Actuarial Association is a professional organization dedicated to enhancing the knowledge base of the actuarial community in the greater Chicago and Milwaukee area. The CAA sponsors programs that promote knowledge of applied actuarial science and encourage professional interaction among local actuaries.

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