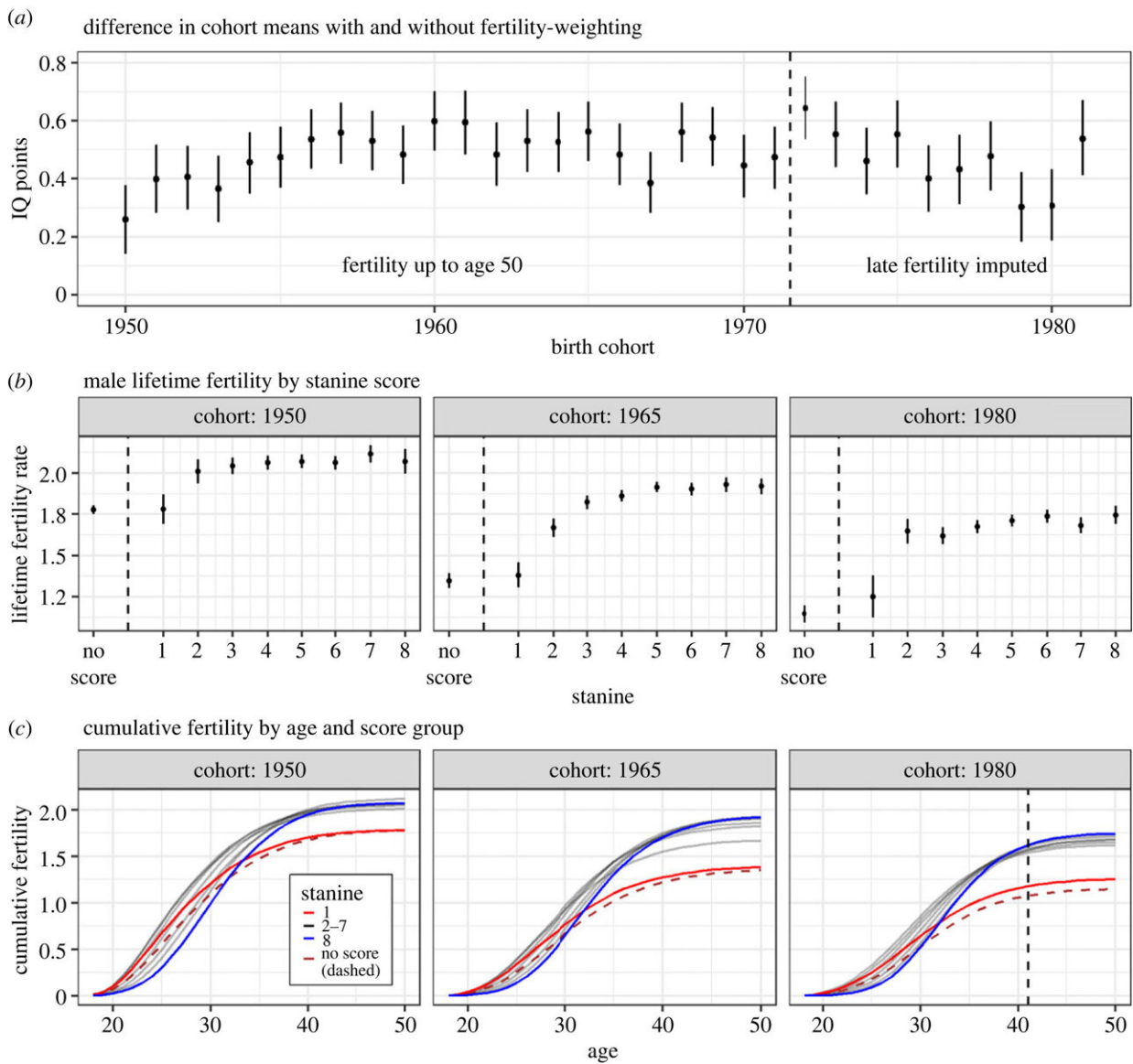


Smarter men are putting off having children until later in life but are still having more children, say economists

June 30 2023, by Bob Yirka



Male fertility patterns by cognitive ability (CA), birth cohort, and age. (a) The difference between weighted and unweighted average birth cohort IQ scores, with weights given by cohort fertility. In panels (a) and (c), the vertical dashed line separates cohorts with fully observed fertility from those with imputed fertility at high ages. The bars are 95% credibility intervals. (b) The expected lifetime fertility rate by CA score group for men in three cohorts, along with 95% credibility intervals. (c) The cumulative fertility rate of each CA stanine across the lifespan, with the lowest and highest stanines emphasized, and with the vertical dashed line for the 1980 cohort separating the model results for the ages with observed and imputed fertility. The unscored group is shown as a dashed line. Cohorts vary in size: 32 792 (1950), 29 949 (1965), 24 529 (1980). Credit: *Biology Letters* (2023). DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2023.0172

A pair of economists at the Ragnar Frisch Center for Economic Research in Norway has found that men who score higher on IQ tests tend to put off having children longer than men who score lower—and yet they still manage to have more children than their lower-scoring associates. In their study, reported in the journal *Biology Letters*, Bernt Bratsberg and Ole Rogeberg analyzed population data for males in Norway living between the years 1950 to 1981.

In their study, the researchers included more than 900,000 Norwegian males, all of whom had undergone military conscription IQ tests as teenagers. They found that men scoring in the top 20% on the IQ tests waited on average until they were 27 years old before having their first child—and they had on average 1.8 offspring. They note that it is likely that IQ plays an indirect role in childbearing for men in Norway.

They point out, for example, that men who score well on their IQ test tend to be more likely to go to college, which can lead to delayed parenting, as can beginning a career at a later age, after college, than

men who do not attend college. And men who go to college tend to make more money later in life than men who do not, allowing them to afford the costs associated with [raising children](#).

Bratsberg and Rogeberg also note that regardless of the economic reasons for the differences in having children, there remain systematic differences in fertility and timing due to cognitive differences in men in Norway, with high-scoring men clearly delaying having children and low-scoring men having children sooner, but having fewer of them. These trends remained stable over time.

Prior research has shown that couples having children later in life can be problematic on a socioeconomic scale—sperm count and delivery issues become more of an issue as a man ages, as does a man's ability to physically care for a child. Also, children born to men age 45 and up have a much higher risk of fathering children with [autism spectrum disorder](#) and ADHD. Also, the risk of miscarriage goes up for women who deliver babies fathered by older men.

More information: Bernt Bratsberg et al, Stability and change in male fertility patterns by cognitive ability across 32 birth cohorts, *Biology Letters* (2023). [DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2023.0172](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2023.0172)

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