

# Remarkable Regularities in the Association of Maternal and Paternal Ages at Childbirth: Evidence from 15 High-Income Countries

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**Background:** Trends in ages at childbirth are usually analyzed separately for women and men. But parental ages and age differences at childbirth bear empirical importance, as shifting age differences among parents likely signify evolving gender power relations.

**Objectives:** This paper aims to investigate the understudied issue of partner age differences at childbirth from the perspectives of mothers and fathers.

**Data and methods:** We analyze 15 high-income countries in Europe, North America, and East Asia over a time span of several decades, with the longest time series starting in the late 1960s. For all countries our analyses are based on high quality vital registration data, covering a total of 315,265,219 births.

**Results:** We show that across the studied countries age differences between parents at childbirth follow an almost linear relationship by age of mother or father. A second important finding is that over time spousal age differences have increased for younger mothers, whereas older mothers have become more likely to partner with similar-aged men. From the perspective of fathers, on the other hand, spousal age differences are decreasing at all ages, i.e., for both young fathers and old fathers.

**Main conclusions:** Spousal age differences by maternal and paternal ages show notable similarities across the culturally diverse high-income countries we study, which is remarkable given the substantial variations in levels and trends of fertility. Our analyses also show the necessity to analyze fertility patterns from the perspectives of men and women separately, as our findings reveal that the effects of recent family changes on spousal age differences are stronger for women than for men. This is in line with existing findings that compare fertility shifts of women and men by social status or age.