

The Health Effects of Becoming a Grandparent

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Abstract

We study the health effects of becoming a grandparent using a representative longitudinal panel study of U.S. persons aged 50 or more. Preliminary results suggest that becoming a grandparent decreases the risk of death in the short term. The effect, however, vanishes in a few years so that those who became grandparents have the same mortality as those who stay without grandchildren. We analyze potential mechanisms and mediating factors, such as changes in behavior (smoking, exercise), other health outcomes (self-rated health, body mass index, diagnosed conditions), and cause-specific mortality. In addition, modifying factors such as own health status are considered. Overall, our preliminary findings suggest that changes in emotional and psychological factors, which we proxy by the change in grandparent status, may have an important influence on health and mortality among middle-aged and older people.

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