

An Exploration of How Parental Age Influences Emerging Adult Well-Being

Parents build the foundation of who people are as children, which can influence how they are able to transition into emerging adulthood (18-29-years-old). Research suggests there is a social stigma for both younger parents and older parents, which can influence how they parent and how their children react (Rice et al., 2019). Specifically, younger parents are often seen as inferior, untrustworthy, and lacking support and resources resulting in negative implications for their children (Rice et al., 2019). Our research questions specially aimed to investigate if there was a difference between parental age groups (i.e., younger and older parents) on emerging adult well-being, stress, financial status, family dynamics, and rates and methods of communication between parent and offspring.

The participants included a total of 80 individuals with an average age of 24.14 years ($SD = 3.35$) and consisted of 48.8% females, 48.8% males, and 2.4% nonbinary/third gender. The ethnicity/race breakdown was 58.8% White-Non-Hispanic, 12.5% Asian or Asian-American, 11.3% White-Hispanic, 8.8% Multiracial, 3.8% Black or African American, 3.8% Black-Hispanic, and 1.3% other. Participants were recruited through *Prolific* and were asked to complete an online survey assessing our research variables.

Analyses revealed several significant correlations, such as caregiving and frequency of communication with a parent ($r = -0.38$), financial assistance of emerging adult (EA) and EA age ($r = -0.52$), family dynamics and caregiving ($r = 0.43$), and family dynamics and frequency of communication with a parent ($r = -0.60$). Additionally, there were significant correlations between perceived stress of EA and frequency of communication with a parent ($r = -0.29$), risk behavior of EA and frequency of communication with a parent ($r = -0.29$), and family dynamics and perceived stress of the EA ($r = 0.27$). Only one independent samples t-test indicated a

significant difference between the parental age groups on outcomes. The parental ages were split in half into larger (i.e., older parents) and smaller age difference (i.e., younger parents) between the parents and emerging adults. Results indicated a significant difference between age groups on perceived stress, $t(78) = 2.17, p = 0.03, d = .49$. Specifically, emerging adults with younger parents ($M = 3.01, SD = .23$) reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress than emerging adults with older parents ($M = 2.90, SD = .23$), and this was a medium sized effect.

These findings extend the knowledge on the effect of parent age on emerging adults mental well-being, risk behavior, perceived stress, family dynamics, financial status, and communication methods with their parents. Results suggest that there are no significant relationships between parent age and EA well-being, financial status, or frequency of communication. We did find parental age differences on the perceived amount of stress that emerging adults feel, where emerging adults with younger parents reported significantly more stress. It is possible this occurred because younger parents do not have as many resources to help their children as opposed to older parents. The information gained will contribute to the growing field of emerging adulthood research to not only to show what associations exist, but what associations do not exist which are just as important.