

Babies who look like their father at birth are healthier one year later: study

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Distinguished research professor of Economics at Binghamton University Solomon Polachek Credit: Binghamton University, State University of New York

Infants who resemble their father at birth are more likely to spend time together with their father, in turn, be healthier when they reach their first birthday, according to new research co-conducted by faculty at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

"Fathers are important in raising a [child](#), and it manifests itself in the [health](#) of the child," said Distinguished Research Professor of Economics at Binghamton University Solomon Polachek.

Polachek, along with Marlon Tracey from Southern Illinois University, based their analysis on data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing (FFCW) study, which focused on 715 families in which [babies](#) live with only their mother. Data from the first two waves of the study indicated that infants who looked like their father at birth were healthier one year later, suggesting that father-child resemblance induces a father to spend more time engaged in [positive parenting](#), as these [fathers](#) spent an average of 2.5 more days per

month with their babies than fathers who didn't resemble their offspring.

"Those fathers that perceive the baby's resemblance to them are more certain the baby is theirs, and thus spend more time with the baby," said Dr. Polachek.

The result has implications regarding the role of a father's time in enhancing [child health](#), especially in fragile families, said the researchers.

"We find a child's health indicators improve when the child looks like the father...The main explanation is that frequent father visits allow for greater parental time for care-giving and supervision, and for information gathering about child health and economic needs. It's been said that 'it takes a village' but my coauthor, Marlon Tracey, and I find that having an involved father certainly helps," added Polachek.

The researchers said that this study supports policies for encouraging nonresident fathers to engage in frequent positive parenting to improve early childhood health.

"Greater efforts could be made to encourage these fathers to frequently engage their children through parenting classes, health education, and job training to enhance earnings," said Polachek.

The paper, "If looks could heal: Child health and paternal investment," was published in the *Journal of Health Economics*.

More information: Marlon R. Tracey et al, If looks could heal: Child health and paternal investment, *Journal of Health Economics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jhealeco.2017.11.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2017.11.007)

Provided by Binghamton University

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