Correction to ‘Elevated germline mutation rate in teenage fathers’

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In our recent paper on teenage parents’ germline mutations [1], we mentioned that the oldest father in our sample of 11,548 biological fathers was 70 years old at the conception of his child. We did not comment on it at the time, but it struck us that this father’s age was an outlier, as the next oldest father in our sample is nearly 5 years younger. We have now retrieved the original documentation and found that a typographical error had been made: this man in fact was born precisely 20 years later than stated. In other words, this father was only 50 years old at the conception of his child, and the confirmed oldest father in our sample, therefore, is a different man who was only 65.4 years old at conception.

This error does not affect any of our published conclusions, as our cut-off age was 50 years for the paternal statistical analysis. But the error could be misleading for fertility researchers if we gave the impression that men can father children at the age of 70.

Given that 65 years is the maximal age for male procreation in our sample, the question arises whether this is a social or a biological age limit. We can tentatively address this question by consulting the Münster subset of our male sample, where we have fully recorded negative as well as positive paternity testing results, and can check whether there is a discontinuity at around age 65. Overall, the Münster casework of 12,823 putative fathers across all ages shows that 83% of putative fathers are indeed biological fathers. Similarly, in the age cohort of 60–65 years, we have 21 men who underwent paternity testing, and 17 (81%) of these were biological fathers. By contrast, in the age cohort of 65–73 years, we have six putative fathers who underwent DNA testing, and only one of them (the youngest, being 65.4 years old at conception) was a biological father. This seems to favour 65–66 years as being a biological rather than a social age limit for fatherhood.

Reference