Science & Technology

Having Kids May Lead to Brain Damage, and Other Science News

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Stress is a memory killer

Raising three or more children increases a parent's risk of developing dementia, with the negative impact on cognitive function equivalent to an additional 6.2 years of aging, according to a study by Vegard Skirbekk of Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health and Éric Bonsang of Paris Dauphine University. The authors hypothesize that the psychological stress of child-rearing is to blame.

Skirbekk and Bonsang’s study is one of several new publications to suggest that stress can erode your memory. Another paper by epidemiologists Katrina Kezios '21PH and Adina Zeki Al Hazzouri of the Mailman School shows that low-wage workers who face constant money worries during their work years suffer faster memory decline in old age. And a new report co-authored by Columbia neuropsychologist Jennifer Manly finds that the stress of experiencing racism can contribute to cognitive decline and may help explain high rates of dementia among Black and Hispanic Americans.

Why Zoom squelches creativity

Virtual meetings are not conducive to creative brainstorming, according to research by Melanie S. Brucks, an assistant professor of business in the marketing division of Columbia Business School, and Jonathan Levav of Stanford. The experts say staring intently at a computer narrows our field of vision and deprives us of small moments of inspiration that often occur during in-person meetings, when we can survey the room or stare off into space.

Unequal numbers

Columbia social psychologist Rebecca Ponce de Leon has found that people tend to overestimate the size of ethnic-minority groups in their communities, and that the more culturally different a minority group’s members are seen as being, the more their numbers are perceived as increasing over time.

Snail-mail solution

One-quarter of adolescents and young adults who are prescribed opioids for cancer pain abuse the medications once their cancer treatment is done. Yet according to research by Dawn L. Hershman ’01PH, providing patients a convenient way to return their unused pills through the mail significantly reduces this number.

Don’t tell Siri

A team of Columbia computer scientists led by Carl Vondrick and Mia Chiquier ’22SEAS has developed a whisper-quiet ambient-noise generator that could prevent microphones in computers, smartphones, and other electronic devices from surreptitiously listening in on our private conversations.

Sleepless with child

Pregnant Black women get less sleep and are awakened more frequently during the night than pregnant white women, which may increase their risk of preterm birth, preeclampsia, and other complications, according to a large multi-institutional study by Maristella Lucchini of Columbia University Irving Medical Center.

Guide to school abbreviations

All categories >