

The empty nest may not be so bad after all

A recent study from UC Berkeley found that the “empty nest” of married couples after their children leave home may actually improve marital satisfaction in middle aged women.

One hundred twenty-three married women born between 1937 and 1939 were given measures of marital satisfaction in 1981, 1989, and 1998-99. From the age of 43 (first testing) to 52 (second testing) those women whose last child had left home showed a slight but significant improvement in marital satisfaction, whereas those who still had kids at home showed a significant decline in marital satisfaction. From the age of 53 to 61 (third testing), those women whose children had left home in the earlier interval maintained their higher level of marital satisfaction, and the women whose children left during the second interval showed an improvement in marital satisfaction which matched the other women.

So what was it about children leaving home that improved marital satisfaction? The researchers found that it was more quality time spent with husbands! Thus there may be life after kids after all.

Gorchoff, S.M., John, O.P., & Helson, R. Contextualizing change in marital satisfaction during middle age. *Psychological Science*, 2008, Vol. 19, Pp 1194-1200.