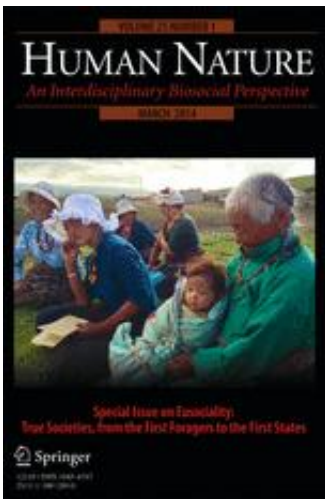


# Tick-tock: How to quite literally speed up a woman's biological clock

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The metaphor of a ticking clock is often used to refer to a woman's growing urge – from puberty onwards to menopause – to conceive before her childbearing years are over. New research in Springer's journal *Human Nature* shows that there's more truth to this phrase than you might think. The subtle sound of a ticking clock can quite literally speed up a woman's reproductive timing. That is, the sound of a ticking clock can lead women to want to start a family at an earlier age, especially if she was raised in a lower socio-economic community. This is according to Justin Moss and Jon Maner of Florida State University in the US.

Reproductive timing refers to the time frame and the specific years during which people begin to focus their energy and resources towards bearing and caring for their offspring. Some researchers reason that when and how this happens is greatly influenced by a person's childhood years, his or her socio-economic background, and other subtle environmental factors.

Moss and Maner completed two experiments to test the influence of a subtle environmental factor – the ticking of a small white kitchen clock – on people's reproductive timing attitudes. In the first, 59 men and [women](#) were asked questions about the age at which they'd like to marry and start a family. It assessed how socio-economic background might influence some people to press the snooze button of their biological clocks, or begin to act. In the second experiment, the researchers examined to what extent 74 participants would alter the characteristics they normally sought in potential mates to possibly settle for less just in order to have children sooner.

Their findings suggest that priming the idea of the passage of time through the sound of a ticking clock can influence various aspects of women's reproductive timing. The effect was especially noticeable among women who grew up in lower socio-economic communities. They wanted to get married and have their first child at a younger age than women with more resources. They also lowered the priority that they placed on men's social status and long-term earning potential. However, the effect of the clock did not do the same for men. The researchers were not surprised by this because men are able to father children well into their old age. Their reproductive lives are therefore not as limited as that of women.

"The very subtle sound prime of a ticking clock changed the timing with which women sought to have children and the traits they sought in potential partners—both central aspects of women's mating-related

psychology," says Moss.

"The findings suggest that a woman's childhood years can interact with subtle environmental stimuli to affect her reproductive timing during adulthood," adds Maner.

**More information:** Moss, J.H. & Maner, J.K. (2014). The Clock Is Ticking: The Sound of a Ticking Clock Speeds Up Women's Attitudes on Reproductive Timing. *Human Nature*. [DOI: 10.1007/s12110-014-9210-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-014-9210-7)

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