Are humans cooperative breeders? A review of the empirical evidence

Rebecca Sear
Durham University

Children pose a problem. An unusually extended period of childhood dependency and relatively short inter-birth intervals mean that human mothers have to care for several dependent children simultaneously. Most evolutionary anthropologists now agree that this is too much of an energetic burden for mothers to manage alone. It has been suggested instead that humans are cooperative breeders: mothers must enlist help from other relatives to share the costs of raising children. If this is the case, then there should be empirical evidence which documents the beneficial effects of kin on reproductive success. Here I review studies which have investigated the impact of kin on components of reproductive success.

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