Evolution research answers why it ‘takes a village’ to raise human children

It’s been said often enough to become cliché—it takes a village to raise a child. But how many of us have ever thought about why? A new study goes a long way toward an answer.

Co-authored by Erik Otárola-Castillo, a fellow in David Pilbeam’s paleoanthropology laboratory in the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology, and Karen Kramer, a professor of anthropology at the University of Utah, the findings suggest that evolutionary changes in birth interval and the time it takes for children to reach independence have combined to put significant pressure on time management, forcing mothers to recruit help from older children, extended families, and the larger community. The research is described in a recent paper in the Journal of Human Evolution.

“We use the colloquialism that ‘It takes a village’ quite frequently,” Otárola-Castillo said. “The question we wanted to ask was, ‘At what point does it take that?’ We don’t see this in chimpanzees, but we do in humans. At some point humans shared a common ancestor with chimpanzees—at some point our evolutionary lineages were similar, but when did we change, and why?”

“Modern human mothers are very interesting, because they’re unlike mothers of most other species,” Kramer added. “We feed our young after weaning, and others help us to raise our children. But this wasn’t always the case. Deep in the past, mothers likely received no help … so we have to ask why others cooperate with mothers to help them raise their children.”

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Findings shed light on evolutionary factors behind cooperative parenting