



Role of Gender in the Effects of Immediate Family Network Members' Deaths on Adult Children's Psychological Well-Being

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Background

- The impact of major negative life events that are shared by all members of networks, such as the deaths of central members, may be shaped by the gender of both the individual who experienced the event and of other members of the network.
- We use data from the Within-Family Differences Study to explore how the psychological well-being of adult children is affected differentially by the deaths of mothers, fathers, and siblings, as well as to examine how gender shapes these processes.

Research Questions

- How is the psychological well-being of adult children affected differentially by the deaths of their mothers, fathers, and siblings?
- Does the effect of the deaths of mothers, fathers, or siblings on psychological well-being differ by ego's gender?

Data

Within-Family Differences Study-II

- Data collected 2001-2003 (T1) & 2008-2011 (T2)
- At T1, recruited mothers living in the Boston Metro Area who had at least 2 living children
- At T2, interviewed 420 mothers ages 72-82 (86% of T1 mothers still living at T2). Interviewed 835 adult children.

Acknowledgements

J.J. Suitor acknowledges funding from the National Institute on Aging (2R01 AG18869-04); J. Suitor & M. Gilligan also acknowledge funding from the National Institute on Aging (1R56AG062767-01) and the Office of the E. V. P. for Research & Office of the Provost, Purdue. J. Suitor, M. Rurka, Y. Hou and R. Frase also acknowledge support from the Center on Aging & Life Course, Purdue University.

Analytic Sample

- N=794 adult children interviewed at T2 with at least one living sibling (nested within 347 families)

Measures

DV: Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (Ross & Mirowsky, 1988)

- Range= 7-28; Mean= 11.68; SD= 4.7; Alpha= 0.85

Focal IVs: Death of Family Members Since Last Wave

- Death of sibling since last wave (1=Yes)
- Death of mother since last wave (1=Yes)
- Death of father since last wave (1=Yes)

Descriptive Statistics

Characteristics of Respondents at T2	%; Mean (SD)
Adult Child Level Characteristics (N=794)	
Death of sibling since last wave (%)	5.8
Death of mother since last wave (%)	8.4
Death of father since last wave (%)	14.7
Daughter (%)	57.8
Married (%)	69.0
Parent (%)	75.2
Education 13+ years (%)	69.3
Age in Years	49.8 (6.4)
Family Level Characteristics (N=347)	
White, non-Hispanic (%)	77.5
Number of Adult Children	3.3 (1.9)

Analytic Plan

- Because the 794 adult children were nested within 347 families, we used multilevel linear regression, which accounts for nonindependence and allow for correlated error structure.

Findings

Predicting Depressive Symptoms¹
N=794 adult children nested within 347 families (full analytic sample)

Predictors	Estimate
Death of Sibling Since Last Wave	.58
Death of Father Since Last Wave	1.04*
Death of Mother Since Last Wave	.92

Predicting Depressive Symptoms by Gender¹

Predictors	Sons	Daughters
Death Sib. Since Last Wave	-.02	1.18
Death Fath. Since Last Wave	.84	1.03 ⁺
Death Moth. Since Last Wave	-.11 ^a	1.43*

*p<.05.; +p=.06

^ap<.10 difference between coefficients across models for death of mother since last wave.

¹Controlling on family size, race, child's age, educational attainment, marital status, employment status, and subjective health, and years since death of each parent.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

These findings suggest that gender of parent and adult child play a role in the impact of death on psychological well-being. Main effects analysis shows that only fathers' death predicts depressive symptoms. However, separate analyses by gender reveal that mothers' death is the strongest predictor, but only among daughters. The findings suggest that fathers' death impacts daughters' well-being, although the effect is more muted and does not differ strongly by gender. Sibling death does not predict symptoms. These findings reflect the strong role of gender in intergenerational relations and health, even after death.