

# The Association between the Death of a Biological Parent and the Quality of Romantic Relationships of their Adult Children

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## Introduction

- The loss of a parent can change the course of someone's life.
- Parent death before the age of 18 is associated with higher rates of relationship formation in young women but lower rates in young men but both groups experienced higher rates of separation (Høeg et al., 2018).
- In the Netherlands from 1840-1950, the death of a parent led to a delay in marriage for sons but did not have an impact on daughters (Rosenbaum-Feldbrügge & Debiasi, 2019).
- For those who lost a parent or both parents to the tsunami in Indonesia in December of 2004, they immediately experienced impacts on school attendance and time allocation, and long-term impacts on their ability to contribute to society through the production of human capital (Cas et al., 2014).
- It remains unclear what the result would be of combining the ideas of parental death during adulthood and romantic relationship quality.

## Methods

### Sample

- 4196 responses from Wave 5 of the The U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth).
- AddHealth is a representative study of the U.S. population which was given to participants during adolescence (Wave 1) and again in their 30s and 40s (Wave 5).

### Measures

- Quality of Romantic Relationships was measured by looking at if the participant was currently married, if they were happy in their current relationship and their current plan for children with their partner.
- Parental death was measured by the answer to the question of if their biological mother or father was alive. Participants were then coded into groups of having either 0, 1 or 2 parents alive.
- Siblings alive was measured by if participants said they had any living siblings and coded into 0 for no living siblings or 1 for living siblings, excluding only children from analysis.

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between biological parent death and quality of romantic relationship for their adult children?
- Is there an association between the number of living biological parents and the quality of romantic relationships for their adult children?
  - Is there an association between living biological parents and being married?

## Results

### Univariate

- 72.879% of participants reported that their biological father was still alive and 86.678% reported their biological mother was still alive
- 58.389% report being currently married

### Bivariate

- Chi-square analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between those whose parents were alive and if they were currently married ( $\chi^2 = 16.368$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000279$ )
- Post-hoc testing revealed that the relationship was significant ( $p\text{-value} = 0.0006$ ) when comparing one alive parent and two alive parents
- Chi-square analysis did not reveal significant relationships between the other variables investigated

### Multivariate

- Logistic regression showed that the significant relationship continues to exist when controlled for whether respondents have siblings who are alive (Parents Alive:  $OR = 1.26$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000156$ , Siblings Alive:  $OR = 1.44$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.006855$ ) (Figure 2)
- For each additional parent alive, the odds someone is married is multiplied by 1.26. For those with siblings alive, they are 1.44 times more likely to be married.

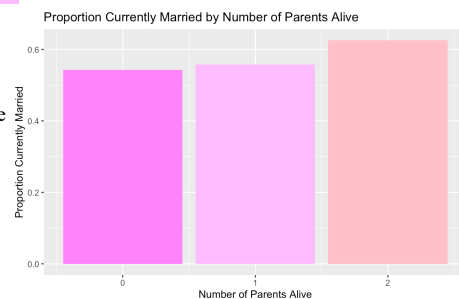


Figure 1

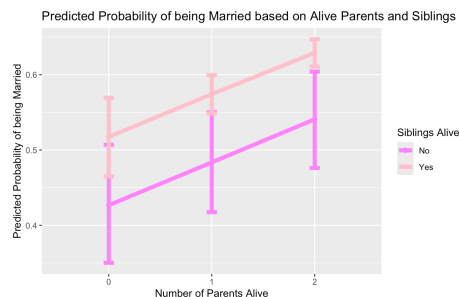


Figure 2

## Discussion

- There is a significant relationship between someone being currently married and the number of parents they have alive
- This relationship continues to be significant when controlling for if they have siblings alive
- The other variables compared for quality of romantic relationship (Happiness in Current Relationship and Current Plan for Children with Partner) were found to be not significant
- There could be factors that were not investigated including income, age, mental and physical health concerns and other family dynamics that could also contribute to this question
- Future studies could incorporate an interview component to understand more of their relationship dynamics

## References

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