

Parental bereavement increases mortality in older persons

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ABSTRACT

Studies of the link between parental grief and subsequent morbidity and mortality risks have yielded inconclusive results. We aim to investigate whether the death of a child is related to increased mortality in older parents. Data were drawn from a national survey of a random sample of older Jewish persons in Israel, conducted during 1989–1992. Analyses included 1239 self-respondent community-dwelling and institutionalized participants ages 75–94 years ($M = 83.1$, $SD = 5.3$) from the Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Aging Study (CALAS). Mortality data at 20-year follow-up were recorded from the Israeli National Population Registry. Bereaved parents were somewhat older, and were more likely than nonbereaved parents to be women, unmarried, less educated, living alone, and born in the Middle East or North Africa. Bereaved parents were more depressed and functionally limited than were nonbereaved parents, even after controlling for age and gender. The longitudinal analysis showed that parental bereavement was a significant predictor of mortality at 20-year follow-up. The effect of bereavement on mortality persisted after controlling for age, gender, origin, education, and widowhood status. It was more potent for women (mothers) than for men (fathers). Whereas parental bereavement due to war is most frequently discussed in the Israeli context, parental bereavement is mostly associated with disadvantageous socioeconomic situations and life conditions. Contrary to some previous findings, results highlight the hazardous long-term effect of bereavement on mortality. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2013 APA, all rights reserved)

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