

## Death of a parent in childhood associated with increased suicide risk

November 11 2015

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The death of a parent in childhood was associated with a long-term risk of suicide in a study of children from three Scandinavian countries who were followed for up to 40 years, according to an article published online by *JAMA Psychiatry*.

In Western societies, 3 percent to 4 percent of children experience the death of a parent and it is one of the most stressful and potentially harmful life events in childhood. While most children and adolescents adapt to the loss, others develop preventable social and psychological problems.

Mai-Britt Guldin, Ph.D., of Aarhus University, Denmark, and colleagues used nationwide register data from 1968 to 2008 in Denmark, Sweden and Finland (for a total of 7.3 million individuals) to identify 189,094 children (2.6 percent) who had a parent die before the child turned 18 (the bereaved group). For comparison, the authors matched those bereaved children with 10 other children (n=1.89 million children) who did not have a parent die to examine the long-term risks of [suicide](#) after parental death (the reference group). Both groups were followed for up to 40 years.

Authors report 265 individuals from the bereaved group (0.14 percent) who lost a parent during childhood and 1,342 individuals from the reference group (0.07 percent) who did not lose a parent during childhood died from suicide during follow-up. During 25 years of follow-up, the absolute risk of suicide was 4 in 1,000 persons for boys who

experienced parental death in childhood and 2 in 1,000 persons for girls. The risk for suicide was high for children whose parent died of suicide but also high for children whose parent died of other causes, according to the results.

The authors note their register-based study had no information on important risk factors including genetic factors, social network and family lifestyle factors.

"Our study points to the early mitigation of distress to reduce the risk of suicidal behavior among [children](#) who had a parent who died during [childhood](#)," the study concludes.

**More information:** *JAMA Psychiatry*. Published online November 11, 2015. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.2094](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.2094)

Provided by The JAMA Network Journals

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