

Does death of a sibling in childhood increase risk of death in surviving children?

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Bereavement in childhood due to the death of a sibling was associated with an increased risk for death in both the short and long term, according to a new article published by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Nearly 8 percent of individuals in the United States are estimated to have experienced a sibling dying in childhood.

Yongfu Yu, Ph.D., of Aarhus University Hospital, Denmark, and coauthors conducted a population-based study that included more than 5 million Danish and Swedish children who survived the first six months of life. Death of a sibling was experienced by 55,818 (1.1 percent) in childhood (from six months after birth until 18) and the median age was 7 at sibling loss. During a follow-up of 37 years, 534 individuals in this bereaved group died.

Compared with those who did not experience the death of a sibling, the bereaved group had a 71 percent increased risk of death from all causes. The increased risk of death after a sibling's death was seen across the follow-up but higher risks of death were found in the first year after a sibling's death, as well as among same-sex sibling pairs or siblings with a small age difference, according to the results.

Limitations of the study include a lack of data on social environment and family characteristics which might help explain underlying reasons that link sibling death and [increased risk](#) of death for the bereaved sibling. Other factors may also exert influence over the associations researchers have detailed.

"Health care professionals should be aware of children's vulnerability after experiencing sibling [death](#), especially for same-sex sibling pairs and [sibling](#) pairs with close age. Social support may help to reduce the level of grief and minimize potential adverse health effects on the bereaved

individuals," the article concludes.

More information: *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online April 24, 2017. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.0197](#)

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