

Adjustment Outcomes Following Paternal Loss among Adolescents

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Introduction

- Approximately 3.5% of American children experience the death of a parent by age 18 (Haine, Sandler, Wolchick & Weyer, 2003).
- Leads to lifestyle disruptions: (Lin, Sandler, Ayers, Wolchick & Luecken, 2004)
 - Decrease in family income
 - School & home relocation
 - Changes in caregivers
 - Loss of friends

Problems with Previous Research

- Conflicting results
- Methodological concerns
 - Small sample sizes
 - Use of clinical populations
 - Lack of control groups
 - Unequal cell sizes
 - Reliance on parental report
 - Diverse age range of participants

Current Study

- Outcomes
 - Depression/Anxiety
 - Self-Esteem
 - Somatic Complaints
 - Delinquency/Aggression
- Predictors
 - Gender
 - Time since death
 - Age of adolescent
 - Current relationship with mother as judged by adolescent

Participants

- 702 adolescents
 - Add Health dataset (Bearman, Jones, Udry, 1998)
 - 43.9% male, 56.1% female
 - Grades 7-12
 - Ages 12- 21 years
 $M= 16.15$, $SD= 1.77$

Participants

- 3 groups
 - 234: paternal death 0-18 years prior ($M=6.28$, $SD=4.50$) & living with biological mother
 - 234: parental divorce & resided with biological mother
 - 234: intact homes with both biological parents
- Randomly matched by
 - Biological sex, grade in school, race/ethnicity, IQ level, mother's education level

Measures

- **Depression/Anxiety**
 - Feelings Scale (Radloff & Locke, 1986)
Cronbach alpha = .87
- **Self-Esteem**
 - Self-Concept Scale (Anderman, 2002)
Cronbach alpha = .86
- **Somatic complaints**
 - 14 items chosen (Chapman 2005)
Cronbach alpha = .81
- **Delinquency/Aggression**
 - 15 items (Cota-Robles, Neiss, & Rowe, 2002)
Cronbach alpha = .83

Hypotheses

- **Group Comparisons**
 1. Paternally bereaved adolescents: ↑ levels of depression/anxiety, somatic complaints, delinquency/aggression, & ↓ lower levels of self-esteem
 2. Females: ↑ levels of depression/anxiety & somatic complaints
 3. Males: ↑ levels of self-esteem & delinquency/aggression

Hypotheses

- **Predictors within bereaved adolescents**
 1. Similar gender findings
 2. Time since death ↑ symptoms ↓
 3. Age of adolescent ↑ symptoms ↓
 4. Quality of relationship with mother symptoms ↓ ↑

Group Comparison Results

- Only significant difference between the groups:
Delinquency/Aggression
($F(2, 695) = 5.47, p = .004, \eta^2 = .015$)
- No differences found between the groups for Depression/Anxiety, Self-Esteem or Somatic Complaints

Group Comparison Results

Means & Standard Deviations for
Delinquency/Aggression

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Paternal Death	.249	.289
Divorced	.295	.342
Intact	.208	.225

Group Comparison Results: Gender differences

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
• Depression/Anxiety		
Males	.459	.268
Females	.568	.333
• Self-Esteem		
Males	4.18	.569
Females	4.04	.646
• Somatic Complaints		
Males	.588	.275
Females	.687	.307
• Delinquency/Aggression		
Males	.293	.327
Females	.217	.255

Predictor Results: Depression/Anxiety

- Significant predictors for bereaved adolescents:
 - Quality of relationship with mother
($\Delta R^2 = .041$, F change (1, 217) = 10.14, $p = .002$)
As QOR \uparrow Depression/Anxiety \downarrow
- Gender Effect
 - Females > symptoms

Predictor Results: Self-Esteem

- Only significant predictor for bereaved adolescents:
 - Quality of relationship with mother
($\Delta R^2 = .070$, F change (1, 217) = 17.14, $p < .001$)
As QOR \uparrow Self-Esteem \uparrow

Predictor Results: Somatic Complaints

- Only significant predictor for bereaved adolescents:
 - Gender of adolescent
 - Females > complaints

Predictor Results: Delinquency/Aggression

- Only significant predictor for bereaved adolescents:
 - Quality of relationship with mother
($\Delta R^2 = .064$, F change (1, 217) = 15.25, $p < .001$)
As QOR \uparrow Delinquency/Aggression \downarrow
- Gender Effects
 - Males > externalizing behaviors

Possible Explanations

- Depression/Anxiety
 - Males reluctant to endorse symptoms
 - Mothers more emotionally expressive of grief (Pleck, 1995)
 - Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980)
- Self-Esteem
 - Importance of peers (Berk, 2000)
 - Males concerned with appearing "weak" (Boldizar, 1991)

Possible Explanations

- Somatic Complaints
 - Discuss psychological responses of grief with mother
 - Cause of death
 - Increased cognitive processing
 - Males reluctant to endorse less "masculine" symptoms

Possible Explanations

- Delinquency/Aggression
 - Exposure to parental strife or violence (Kelly, 2000)
 - Males generally exhibit higher levels of externalizing behaviors (Vandewater & Lansford, 1998)
 - Ability to express grief with mother leads to less externalization of symptoms

Paternal Loss & Adolescent Sexual Risk Behavior

- Few studies
- Contradictory results
- Considered:
 - # of sexual partners
 - Likelihood of condom use during most recent sexual experience

Paternal Loss & Adolescent Sexual Risk Behavior

- Hypotheses:
 - Adolescents who had experienced paternal loss due to divorce would:
 - Have more sexual partners
 - Be less likely to use a condom during most recent sexual experience
 - African American adolescents would report greater # of sexual partners regardless of family category

Participants

- Original data set used
- Total of 203 due to incomplete data
 - 49.8% male
 - 50.2% female
- Family composition:
 - 82 paternal death 0-18 years prior ($M = 7.2, SD = 5.0$)
 - 70 parental divorce
 - 51 intact families

Participants

- Ages: 13- 2 years ($M = 16.9, SD = 1.55$)
- Demographically matched
- Racial Groups:
 - 38.4% Caucasian
 - 48.3% African American
 - 13.3% Other

Mean # of Sexual Partners

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Paternal Death	4.3	5.0
Divorce	6.9	6.1
Intact	5.7	5.2

Racial Differences for # of Sexual Partners

- Only significant difference found for Caucasian males

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Paternal Death	2.3	1.2
Divorce	5.0	2.3
Intact	4.0	2.3

Condom Use

Family Category	% Condom Use
Paternal Death	42.9%
Divorce	33.7%
Intact	23.4%

Conclusions

- Paternally bereaved adolescents are resilient
- Long-term externalizing symptoms more prominent for adolescents who have experienced paternal loss due to divorce
- Gender differences for bereaved adolescents exist
- Quality of relationship with mother moderates negative outcomes

Future Areas of Study

- Adjustment differences between types of death
- Empirically validated inventories
- Longitudinal data
- Additional factors to predict long-term adjustment

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