Linked Lives: Offspring Education and Parents' Cognitive Functioning in Later Life

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Abstract

Objectives. The interdependence between parents and children suggests that one generation can have a significant impact on the other generation's life. Previous studies have primarily centered on parental influence on children's well-being. This study, however, focuses on upward intergenerational transmission from adult children to parents. Specifically, it examines whether offspring education is associated with parents' cognitive functioning in later life after controlling for parents' own education, and whether this association varies by parents' age and gender.

Method. Growth curve models were estimated by using nine waves of data from the Health and Retirement Study (N=14,690).

Results. Offspring education is positively associated with parents' cognitive functioning in later life net of parents' own education. Further investigation reveals that the positive association between offspring education and parents' cognitive functioning varies by parents' age but not parents' gender.

Discussion. These findings highlight the importance of adopting a multigenerational perspective for studying cognitive health and aging.

Keywords: education—cognitive aging—family relationships—cognitive reserve