

# **The Education of Family Members, Linked Lives, and the Life Course Pathways to Cognitive Impairment**

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## **Abstract**

Family background is an important predictor of cognitive health. Although recent research focuses on how the resources of prior generations (e.g., parents' education and income) shape later-life cognitive health, fewer studies assess whether latter generations (e.g., offspring) also influence cognitive functioning among older adults. This paper asks how the educational attainment of adult children, in addition to an individual's own education, is associated with cognitive impairment among older parents in the United States. Results indicate that more years of offspring schooling are associated with a lower risk of becoming cognitively impaired, even after accounting for the respondent's and the respondent's parents' education. In addition, our findings indicate that respondent health conditions serve as an important mechanism behind the association between children's education and parents' cognitive health. The study highlights a potentially overlooked source of health disparities - offspring resources - and underscore how a family perspective remains a powerful tool to understanding cognitive health inequalities in later life.