

# Frequent arguments with family and friends linked to doubling in death risk in middle age

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Frequent arguments with partners, relatives, or neighbours may boost the risk of death from any cause in middle age, suggests research published online in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*.

Men and those not in work seemed to be the most vulnerable, the findings indicate.

The evidence suggests that supportive social networks and strong relationships are good for general health and wellbeing, but the authors wanted to find out if the stressors inherent in family relationships and friendships had any impact on the risk of death from any cause.

They therefore quizzed almost 10,000 men and women aged 36 to 52 about their everyday [social relationships](#). All the participants were already taking part in the Danish Longitudinal Study on Work, Unemployment and Health.

The researchers focused particularly on who, among [partners](#), children, other relatives, friends and [neighbours](#), made excess demands, prompted worries, or was a source of conflict, and how often these arose. They also considered whether having a job made any difference.

The health of the study participants was tracked from 2000 to the end of 2011, using data from the Danish Cause of Death Registry.

Between 2000 and 2011, 196 women (4%) and 226 men (6%) died.

Almost half the deaths were from cancer, while heart disease/stroke, liver disease, and accidents and suicide made up the rest.

Around one in 10 [study participants](#) said that their partner or children were a frequent or constant source of excess demands and worries; around one in 20 (6%) and a further 2% claimed this for relatives and friends, respectively.

Similarly, 6% had frequent arguments with their partner or children, 2% with other relatives, and 1% with friends or neighbours.

After taking account of a range of influential factors, including gender, marital status, long term conditions, depressive symptoms, available emotional support, and social class, as defined by job title, the analysis indicated that frequent worries or demands generated by partners and/or children were linked to a 50%-100% increased risk of death from all causes.

But constant arguing seemed to be the most harmful for health.

Frequent arguments/conflicts with anyone in the social circle - ranging from partners and [relatives](#) to friends and neighbours - were associated with a doubling to tripling in the risk of death from any cause compared with participants who said these incidents were rare.

Being out of work seemed to amplify the negative impact of social relationship stressors. Those who were unemployed were at significantly greater risk of death from any cause than those who were exposed to similar stressors but had a job.

And men seemed to be particularly vulnerable to the worries and demands generated by their female partners, with a higher risk of death than that normally associated with being a man or with this particular

relationship stressor.

The authors accept that personality may have a role in how people perceive, generate, and respond to stress, and so may influence an individual's risk of an early [death](#).

But they conclude that skills in conflict management may help to curb premature deaths associated with social relationship stressors.

**More information:** Stressful social relations and mortality: a prospective cohort study, Online First, [DOI: 10.1136/jech-2013-203675](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2013-203675)

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