

Is depression in parents, grandparents linked to grandchildren's depression?

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Having both parents and grandparents with major depressive disorder (MDD) was associated with higher risk of MDD for grandchildren, which could help identify those who may benefit from early intervention, according to a study published online by *JAMA Psychiatry*.

It is well known that having depressed parents increases children's risk of psychiatric disorders. There are no published studies of depression examining three generations with grandchildren in the age of risk for depression and with direct interviews of all family members.

Myrna M. Weissman, Ph.D., of Columbia University and New York State Psychiatric Institute, New York, studied 251 grandchildren (average age 18) interviewed an average of two times and their biological parents, who were interviewed an average of nearly five times, and grandparents interviewed up to 30 years.

When first comparing two generations, the study suggests grandchildren with depressed parents had twice the risk of MDD compared with nondepressed parents, as well as increased risk for disruptive disorder, substance dependence, suicidal ideation or gesture and poorer functioning.

Comparing three generations, the authors report grandchildren with both a depressed parent and depressed grandparent had three times the risk of MDD. Children without a depressed grandparent but with a depressed parent had overall worse functioning than children without a depressed

parent.

Limitations of the study include its small sample size and a potential lack of generalizability because of its makeup.

"In this study, biological offspring with two previous generations affected with [major depression](#) were at highest risk for major depression, suggesting the potential value of determining family history of [depression](#) in children and adolescents beyond two generations. Early intervention in offspring of two generations affected with moderate to severely impairing MDD seems warranted," the study concludes.

More information: *JAMA Psychiatry*. Published online August 10, 2016. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2016.1586](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2016.1586)

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