

Black and Native American youth experience more family deaths, may hinder education

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The premature death of a parent or sibling can have many direct effects on family members, including hindering their future health and education. University of Minnesota School of Public Health (SPH)

researchers studied who among a group of young adults was most likely to have a sibling or parent die and how often students experiencing such deaths obtain a college education.

The study was led by Ph.D. student Naomi Thyden and recently published in the journal *Annals of Epidemiology*.

To learn more about family deaths, researchers used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, which started studying people in 1997 as teenagers through the present day. When participants were between the ages of 13 and 22, they were asked if they had a sibling or parent die during those years. When they were between 29 and 32 years old, they were asked if they had graduated from college.

The study found:

- Black and Native American adolescents (ages 13-18) and young adults (ages 19-22) were about 2-3 times more likely to have lived through the death of a close family member than white participants;
- young adults, who were college-aged when a sibling or parent died, were about half as likely to graduate from college;
- adolescents, who were high school-aged when a sibling or parent died, seemed to be less affected when it came to graduating from college, perhaps because they had time to recover before starting college.

"The findings show that it's important to design college policies that consider and support all aspects of students' lives, including their own health and the health of their families," said Thyden. "Unfortunately, this research is likely more relevant than before, as data shows COVID-19 causes a disproportionate amount of illness and death among racial and ethnic minorities. It's also important because universities

looking for ways to save money might be tempted to cut elements of student support."

Thyden says future research might look at specific reasons why a family death during college-aged years makes it harder for someone to graduate from college. It should also explore other [life experiences](#) that, in combination with [college](#) policies, hinder graduation among Black and Native American [young adults](#).

Provided by University of Minnesota

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