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# Family ties and depression across the life course: An Overview

By [Nienke Moor](#), [Aafke Komter](#)

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## Abstract

**Background:** Family ties in Europe are affected by demographic trends associated with parenting and partnering, such as a decline in fertility, an increase in childlessness, postponement of parenthood and of partnership formation, the rise of "new" relationship forms and divorce rates. It is unclear how the contemporary family structure and composition are associated with people's mental wellbeing.

**Objective:** This article examines how ties with parents, siblings, a partner and children are associated with depressive mood of men and women in seven Eastern and Western European countries.

**Methods:** To test our hypotheses we made use of data from the Generations and Gender Surveys. We performed logistic regression analyses to study the associations between people's family ties and depressive mood.

**Results:** Our research findings show that family ties can diminish people's depressive feelings. Although we find some gender differences in these associations, we do not find support for the argument that family ties are more important for the mental wellbeing of women than of men. Moreover, our findings support the hierarchical model of family relations in which new ties with partner and children in adulthood gain precedence over the original primary ties with parents and siblings. Finally, we find that the association between family ties and depressive mood is quite similar in Eastern and Western Europe, but being married or having a partner more strongly reduces depressive feelings in Eastern than in Western Europe.

**Conclusions:** Although longitudinal data were not available to us, our research results do provide some indications about how demographic changes, for instance, those affecting family size -- the number of children or siblings -- might be associated with mental wellbeing. Our findings also suggest that the demographic trend of increasing partnership dissolution may have larger consequences for people's mental wellbeing in Eastern than in Western Europe.

## Author's Affiliation

[Nienke Moor](#) - Tilburg University, Netherlands [\[Email\]](#)

[Aafke Komter](#) - Universiteit Utrecht, Netherlands [\[Email\]](#)

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