**One-parent link to smoking and drinking at 11: Children who have lost a parent through death or separation are twice as likely to have tried tobacco or alcohol before they are teenagers**

* **University College London study analysed thousands of British children**
* **They were questioned at three, five, seven and then 11 years old**
* **Children who lost a parent by age of seven more than twice as likely to smoke and 46 per cent more likely to have started drinking alcohol**

By [Rosie Taylor for the Daily Mail](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Rosie+Taylor+for+the+Daily+Mail)

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Children who grow up without one of their parents are more likely to smoke or drink by the age of 11 (stock photo)

Children who grow up without one of their parents are more likely to smoke or drink by the age of 11, a British study found.

Researchers following thousands of children in the UK found those who had 'lost' a parent – either through death or separation – were twice as like to smoke and nearly 50 per cent more likely to have tried alcohol before they were in their teens.

The University College London study analysed data from thousands of British children born between 2000 and 2002, who were questioned at three, five, seven and 11 years old.

At 11, they were asked whether they had ever tried smoking or drinking and whether they had ever had enough alcohol to feel drunk.

More than one in four of the 10,940 children who completed the surveys had 'lost' a parent by the age of seven.

These children were more than twice as likely to smoke and 46 per cent more likely to have started drinking alcohol by age 11, regardless of whether they were girls or boys.

The association was linked to the fact a parent was absent and was not affected by which parent was missing or when they had been 'lost'.

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Smoking and drinking levels among children missing a parent were the same even when other factors were taken into account, including the parents' level of education, ethnicity, the mother's age at parenthood, whether she smoked during pregnancy, the length of the pregnancy and the child's birthweight.

Children whose parent had died were generally less likely to drink alcohol by age 11 than those whose parents were absent for other reasons – but those who did were 12 times as likely to drink to get drunk.

Across all children, including those with both parents, boys were more likely to have smoked or drank alcohol than girls.



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Across all children, including those with both parents, boys were more likely to have smoked or drank alcohol than girls

Nearly one in seven boys had tried alcohol, compared to just over one in ten girls. While boys were twice as likely to have drunk enough to feel inebriated – 12 per cent compared to 6.6 per cent of girls.

Most children had not smoked by 11, but 3.6 per cent of boys had compared to 1.9 per cent of girls.

The researchers said: 'Associations between parental absence and early smoking and alcohol consumption may operate through a range of mechanisms, such as reduced parental supervision, self-medication, and adoption of less healthy coping mechanisms.

'For instance, nicotine in particular demonstrates psychoactive properties and may have benefits for mood regulation.'

The study was observational, so no conclusions could be drawn about cause and effect.

However, the researchers said their findings echoed those of other studies and emphasised how health behaviours established in early life are known to set patterns for later life.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3831661/One-parent-link-smoking-drinking-11-Children-lost-parent-death-separation-twice-likely-tried-tobacco-alcohol-teenagers.html#ixzz4So9sfJ9r>   
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