

# Intergenerational transmission of preventive health seeking behaviors: like mother, like daughter? The case of cancer screening in France

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## Abstract

A key factor in the persistence of social health inequalities is the transmission of health across generations, partly due the transmission of health behaviors. However, the literature has almost exclusively focused on the intergenerational transmission of lifestyle behaviors without considering the transmission of preventive health behaviors that consist of a punctual investment in the health capital. Using the example of cervical and breast cancer screening, we extend the literature on the intergenerational transmission of health focusing on the transmission of preventive health behaviors and health-related preferences. Using data from the French E3N-E4N cohorts (98,995 women followed since 1990 and their voluntary children since 2018), we focused on the use of Pap smears (n=5,993) and of mammography for daughters aged 50 and over (n=2,683 ). Based on 6 survey waves going from 1997 to 2014 and conditioning on eligibility, we constructed for each mother a level of use of Pap smear and mammography, as well as a cancer screening score combining the two. Using probit models and the equality of opportunity framework, we assessed the effect of the mother's past cancer screening behaviors on the probability for the daughter of having a sufficient use of mammography and Pap smear, controlling for potential concurrent explanatory channels. Having a mother's with the highest cancer screening score (vs. lowest) increased by 13pp (IC=[6.8,20]) the probability for the daughter's to sufficiently use Pap smear and by 12pp (IC=[15,23]) the probability for the daughter's to sufficient use mammography. The association persisted after controlling for potential confounding factors that are the transmission of cancer risk, the transmission of wealth and human capital, as well as similar barriers vs. easier of access to care and cancer screenings. The effect is mostly driven by mother's mammography use. Contrary to our expectations, there is no evidence of a moderating effect from public screening incentives, nor of a heterogeneous effect depending on daughter's socioeconomic status. Thus, daughters whose mother insufficiently screened have higher chances to insufficiently screen at their turn. This suggests a persistence of health inequalities across generations through the transmission of preventive health care behaviors, hindering policies attempts to close the gap.

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