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## ABSTRACT

### SITUATIONAL FACTORS IN THE PURCHASE OF BURIAL CASKETS FOR SPOUSES OR PARENTS AND THE POST-CONSUMPTION SATISFACTION OF OLDER SURVIVING SPOUSES AND CHILDREN

All U.S. funeral homes are regulated under the FTC's Funeral Rule with the intention of protecting consumers in the at-need purchase transaction of goods and services in death care. However, other funeral-related businesses, not regulated by the Funeral Rule, are increasingly participating in the sale of funeral goods to consumers. Since the full enactment of the Funeral Rule in 1984, the literature has focused on the effectiveness of the Funeral Rule, the economics of death, funeral-related regulations at the state level, and consumer behavior in death care. However, there is a gap in understanding consumer behavior as it pertains to situational factors in the purchase of burial caskets and consumer satisfaction. This gap provides the foundation for the research question: Is there a relationship between the situational factors of the consumer purchase of a burial casket for a spouse or parent by the surviving spouse or a surviving child and post-consumption satisfaction of these same family members, age 50 and older?

To address the research question, a quantitative and cross-sectional post-event study was conducted that included an online survey with a national consumer panel. The relationship of situational factors and post-consumption satisfaction was evaluated via multiple regression. One of the primary variables of interest, type of retailer, provided preliminary support for third-party seller (compared to funeral home) having a negative relationship with post-consumption satisfaction. Two other primary variables, time between purchase and use (preneed or at-need) and the pricing option (package or itemized) were not supported in relationship to post-

consumption satisfaction. Other variables consisting of product knowledge, involvement, and financial concern were significant in relationship with post-consumption satisfaction.

Demographic variables and additional situational factors were also tested and evaluated.

The study contributed to the literature in providing preliminary support for recommending public policy change for the FTC to regulate all sellers of burial caskets to consumers. Recommendations were also presented for casket manufacturers, funeral homes, and third-party sellers to improve consumer satisfaction. Lastly, suggestions for future research were provided to add to the knowledge in this unique and important area of consumer decision making.