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Gender and inequalities in health in later life

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Abstract

Little research attention has been given to examining inequalities in the health of elderly women and men, in spite of their high use of health services and the importance of health to maintaining independence in later life. This paper uses data from the British General Household Survey to analyse the variation in health of elderly women and men by class and material circumstances. Two measures of health are used; self-assessed health and functional disability. Elderly women assess their own health less positively than men, and are seriously disadvantaged compared to men in terms of functional disability.

Class based on the individual's own previous main occupation is strongly associated with the two measures of health for elderly women and men at all ages. For elderly women, an *individualistic*TM approach, using the women's own last occupation, is compared with the *conventional*TM approach of measuring class, which for married women uses their husband's last occupation and for other women their own last occupation. Using the two approaches makes little difference to the strength of association between

class and health.

Elderly women and men who live in advantaged material circumstances, in terms of income, car ownership and housing tenure, report significantly better health, after controlling for age and class. Level of functional disability is influenced by previous position in the labour market but not current material circumstances. Although elderly women suffer greater morbidity than elderly men, structural inequalities in health are equally pronounced for women and men in later life.



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Keywords

gender; inequalities; elderly people

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Gender and inequalities in health in later life, realism, therefore, is theoretically possible.

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