Differential Exposure and Vulnerability to the Strains of Being Single in Late-Life

ABSTRACT

Objectives. The objective of this study is to examine the differential exposure and vulnerability to the strains of singlehood (“single strain”) in later life.

Methods. Using data from a sub-sample of 532 nonmarried adults 65 years and older, OLS regression techniques were used to estimate the social distribution of single strain and its differential association with anxiety.

Results. Women, whites, and elders with less income report higher average levels of single strain. The positive association between single strain and anxiety is stronger among the widowed compared to the never-married and divorced. In addition, the sense of mastery buffers against the adverse effects of single strain.

Discussion. We discuss the implications of our findings for the stress process model, especially with respect to the differential exposure and vulnerability perspectives, and integrate our findings into the broader literature on marital status differences in well-being.