

The Relationships between Longevity and Different Dimensions of Health: Findings from the Cloister Study

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Life expectancy (LE) has been increasing in developed countries, largely due to the reduction of mortality in old age. An important question is whether additional life-years are primarily spent in good or poor health. We use the proportion of older people in “good health” according to different indicators to calculate healthy life expectancies (HLE) for a sample of Catholic order members and their counterparts in the general population. We find that estimates of HLE depend strongly on the health dimension considered. Because order members live longer than their peers, our results have implications for the compression versus expansion of morbidity debate. Our results suggest that, across both genders, higher LE is associated with compression of morbidity with regards to self-perceived health and activity limitations, and expansion of morbidity with regards to chronic conditions. We demonstrate that the compression/expansion issue is also relevant for understanding gender differences in health and mortality.