

Gender Differences in Health Expectancy among Older Persons in the Philippines

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Extended Abstract

Background

The number of older persons in the Philippines has reached 6.2 million in 2010 and is expected to increase to almost 10 million in 2020. It is expected that along with the projected increase in the number of older people is the corresponding increase in the number of persons with disability. This prospect has thus elevated the health status of older persons in the discussion of aging. One very important indicator in monitoring the health status of the older persons is health expectancy (HE). HE is a widely used indicator to assess population health because it combines mortality and morbidity information into a single measure.

Objectives

1. Investigate gender differences in health expectancy of Filipinos aged 60 years old and over.
2. Examine patterns in functional difficulty of Filipino older persons by demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Methodology

The Sullivan's method will be used to calculate health expectancy among older Filipinos. This method requires data on the age and sex-specific health status of the older population and life expectancy at ages 60 and over. Data on health status of the older persons will be drawn from the 2010 Census of Population and Housing (CPH), while data on life expectancy will be derived from the 2010 life table for the Philippines. The 2010 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) provides indicators on activities of daily living (ADL), sensory, cognitive and speech impairment, which will be used to measure functional ability. In this study, an older person is considered unhealthy or inactive if he or she reported difficulty in the following areas: 1) walking or climbing steps; 2) self-caring (bathing or dressing); 3) seeing, even when wearing eyeglasses; 4) hearing, even when using hearing aid; 5) remembering or concentrating; and 6) communicating using his/her usual language.

Preliminary Results

Results reveal that about 1 in 5 of Filipino older persons have difficulty walking or climbing steps, performing self-care task, seeing, hearing, remembering and communicating. There is little gender difference in the prevalence of functional difficulty among Filipino older persons (19% for women and 18% for men). As expected, the prevalence of functional difficulty monotonically rises with increasing age. Moreover, the proportions of older Filipinos with functional difficulty are significantly higher among those with lower levels of education, the formerly married and those living in rural areas compared to their counterparts.

Consistent with findings from other countries, Filipino older women live longer than older men, but the former spend higher proportion of their remaining life in unhealthy state than the latter. The gender gap in health expectancy among older persons in the Philippines, however, is not as wide compared with earlier studies. For instance, at age 60 a Filipino man is expected to live 16.4 years, 13.1 years of which or 80% of his remaining life expectancy will be disability-free. In contrast, a Filipino woman of the same age is expected to live for 20 years, 15.7 years of which or 78% will be disability free.