

Fact Sheet

Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health

Frailty patterns in Australian women and the impact of income stress in later life

Frailty is a risk factor for poorer health outcomes including falls, hospitalisation, institutionalisation, disability and death.

It can be measured by looking at deficits related to fatigue, strength, mobility, illness and loss of weight.

Little is known about patterns of frailty. Despite the well-known effects of socioeconomic status on health, the effect of socioeconomic status across adulthood on frailty has not been fully investigated.

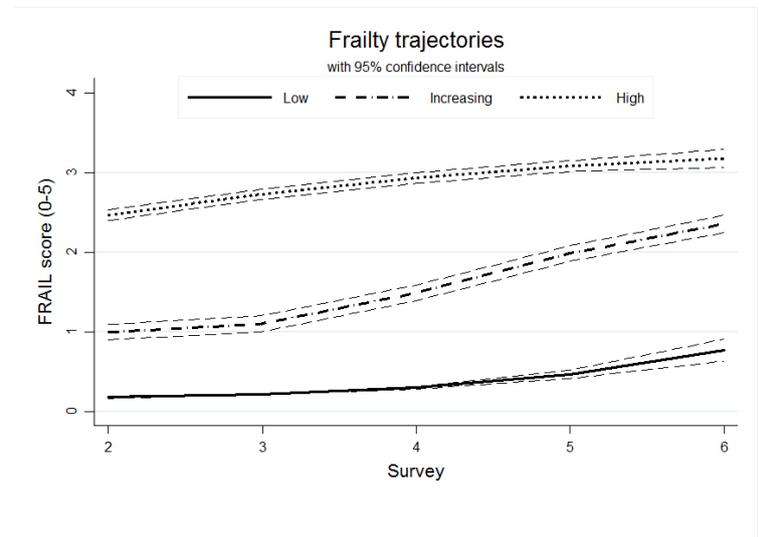


Our research

Almost 7500 older women (born 1921-26) in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, were surveyed every three years between 1999 and 2011. Researchers examined patterns of frailty over this time.

Three distinct patterns were identified. Some women remained free of frailty (19%), some increased in levels of frailty (41%), and some were frail at all time-points (40%).

Education and mid-life occupation were not related to patterns of frailty.



Researchers also investigated the effect of socioeconomic status across adulthood on the patterns: education, mid-life occupation and ability to manage on income in later life.

Women who reported that they found it difficult all of the time / impossible to manage on income were half as likely to be in the frailty free group and three times more likely to be in the frail group.

How can this research be used?

Older women have different patterns of frailty suggesting that it might be possible to identify women for targeted interventions to improve their health and prevent some of the negative outcomes associated with frailty. When looking for predictors of frailty, late life socio-economic status and biological factors should be considered.

Publications

Paul A. Gardiner, Gita D. Mishra, Annette J. Dobson
The Effect of Socioeconomic Status across Adulthood on Trajectories of Frailty in Older Women; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2015.12.090>

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