Gender Inequalities in ADL-dependence: A Two-Cohort Follow-up of Octogenarians

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Objectives
Considering ADL-dependence,
1) We check the accuracy of the gender paradox “Women live longer but are sicker” (cf. Lahelma et al. 1999) in advanced old age.
2) We investigate whether a) social disadvantages and/or b) duration of ADL-dependence prior to death offer elements to explain the gender paradox.

Sample
SWILSO-O is a two-cohort study on aging in Switzerland (n=1,340, n=377)
Sample was stratified by gender and geographical area (urban and semi-rural) and comprised of community-dwelling participants at baseline.
Participants aged 80-84 at baseline were interviewed up to 9 times over 10 years (cohort 1), up to 5 times over 5 years (cohort 2).
362 (50%) of the respondents died, 123 (17%) dropped out the study during the study period.

The gender paradox
Women live longer * but are sicker * (cf. Lahelma et al. 1999) in advanced old age.
At baseline, the gender difference in risk of ADL-dependence is NS (due to the exclusion at baseline of nursing home residents).
Analyses performed with multi-level models.

Results
Gender differences were assessed on:
- ADL-dependence (ability to perform alone at least one of the five ADL activities), using multi-level analysis, n=717
- Severity of ADL-dependence (average of the 5 responses: 0=able, 1=able with difficulty, 2=unable), using multi-level analysis, n=717.
- Duration of ADL-dependence prior to death, using Poisson regression, n=362 decedents.

Combination of social disadvantages in women
Women are clearly more likely than men to face old age living alone and to have lower education, 35% of women (resp. 8% of men) combine both disadvantages.
Women have also lower social status and lower income than men. It illustrates the « Multiple jeopardy » of older women in advanced old age.

Method
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Gender and social differences in duration of ADL-dep.
During very old age and the last stages of life, women suffered from stronger inequalities (social disadvantages combined with longer period of ADL-dependence), which may be the strongest in their entire life course.

Conclusions
Longer periods of ADL-dependence in women as well their social disadvantages contribute to explain gender gap in ADL-dependence prevalence.

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