

Title: Associations between Spousal Absence and Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

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Background/Purpose: Appalachians experience health disparities across the lifespan. With spouses playing a primary source of support for older adults, spousal absence can affect older adults' engagement in life (Hao, 2008; Morrow-Howell, et al., 2009). We sought to examine whether older adults experiencing spousal loss (divorce/separated/widowed) report greater challenges to daily living.

Method: We analyzed data from 15,782 West Virginians using the 2018-2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Using the Web-Enabled Analysis Tool (WEAT), a series of logistic regressions examined the relation between marital status and ADL functioning.

Results: Results showed that those divorced, separated, or widowed were more likely to experience difficulties running errands alone (OR = 2.16), dressing or bathing (OR = 1.98), and walking or climbing stairs (OR = 1.97) than married adults. These effects were especially strong among midlife adults.

Conclusions: Overall, adults in West Virginia without a spouse are at a higher risk of functional disability. This supports the many studies reporting that marriage carries a survival advantage (Andersen & Olsen, 2018).