

Socioeconomic Inequalities in Health among Older Adults: Implications for the Retirement Age Debate

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The debate about raising the retirement age of U.S. workers has revolved primarily around the longer life expectancy of the population and its impact on the solvency of Social Security; consideration of socioeconomic health inequalities has been largely absent. We analyze educational differentials in health among older adults and translate results into age-equivalents. We use the nationally-representative 1997-2009 National Health Interview Surveys for data on general health and limitations among white and black men and women aged 50-75 (N=211,402). Using nonparametric regression models, we calculate age-adjusted health levels across 3 education levels. Results vary across health outcomes and demographic subgroups but generally show that high-educated older white men report health levels equivalent to high school graduates about 10-20 years younger and dropouts 15-25+ years younger. Findings highlight the importance of considering health inequalities in discussions about raising the retirement age, both in terms of fairness and feasibility.

Note: to see the full paper please contact the corresponding author at zajacova@uwyo.edu