

Early-Life War and Later-Life Disability in Vietnam: The Mediating Effect of Post-Traumatic Stress

Research on early-life conditions and later-life health has been proliferating in recent years. Much of this focuses on socioeconomic conditions, parenting and childhood health. War is an often overlooked yet potentially critical early-life event that results in immense trauma with life-long implications for physical and psychological health. Using data from the Vietnam Health and Ageing Study (VHAS) this paper estimates direct and indirect effects of early-life war trauma, and direct effects of post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), on late life disability. Disability is measured as limitations performing ADLs. Wartime trauma is based on scales constructed from indicators of violence, malevolent conditions, bombing, and displacement. Results show that most if not all of the effect of early-life wartime trauma on later-life disability is mediated by PTSS. Given the ubiquity of war and conflict across today's world, these results have implications for long-term health of future generations of older adults.