



SINGLE STATUS IS BAD FOR HEALTH

Research studies around the world have shown an association between marital status and all causes of mortality. These studies have consistently reported increased mortality for single people.

People who have never married constitute a growing part of the population. Researchers in the study analysed for this article took a total of 95 publications based on a total sample size of 500 million people and tried to get some trends from this data. They generally found that the risk of death increased modestly over time for both genders if they were single, but it was more rapid for women.

They tried to look at why this was so and when looking at the premarital health situation, noticed that people who are less likely to get married in the first place were people of both sexes with health problems, less happiness and less emotional stability. In addition, people who are married typically enjoy more social support through companionship and they also have better economic conditions. Married people are also less likely than single people to engage in risky behaviours.

Marriage associated with better health

It has generally been found that being married is associated with better mental and physical health. One study amongst elderly people concluded that single people had an 11% greater risk of early death than married people. When it came to younger people, single people had a 30% increased risk of mortality compared with a married person of the same age. When further analysing the sexes, men had a higher risk of death than women when single – 32% higher for single men and 23% higher for single women.

Researchers have tried to understand some of their results and have suggested that women continue at a disadvantage because there are increasing numbers of single mothers. Women are more likely to have custody of the children and bear the economic burden of this. With reducing social supports in the way of welfare money, health benefits and wages, women are further disadvantaged.

Beyond a certain age, the risk for death of single people reduces again. It has been suggested that this could be because people may acclimatize to being single as they age. Also older people take fewer risks.

These researchers would like more studies to be done to analyse how variables such as health care access, types of work, periods of unemployment, economic assistance received and other life events may affect the health and mortality of single people as compared to married people.

This article was written from information from the following research article: The Rising Relative Risk of Mortality for Singles. Meta-Analysis and Meta-Regression. David J Roelfs et al. American Journal of Epidemiology, 2011; 174(4): 379-389