

Cognitive Function in the Context of Early Life Wartime Stress Exposure: An Analysis of Cognitive Decline in a Cohort of Vietnamese Older Adults

Reference:

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Abstract:

Using data from the Vietnam Health and Aging Study we investigate associations between early-life war-related stressors and later-life cognitive function in a population whose transition to adulthood took place during war. Alzheimer's disease is a leading cause of death in Vietnam and many lower- and middle-income countries, but literature on correlates of later-life cognitive decline in these contexts is sparse. Exposure to wartime stressors is linked to traumatic brain injury and impaired mental health, which increase the risk of cognitive impairment. Our study considers a sample of over 2,000 living in districts in Northern Vietnam differentially exposed to wartime bombing. Results indicate some specific types of war-related trauma relate to later life function, but effects are mediated through PTSD, late life physical health, recent major stressful life events, and emotional support. These forms of mediation present opportunities for intervention to mitigate cognitive decline in Vietnamese older adults.