

War across the life course: Examining the impact of conflict exposure on a comprehensive inventory of health measures in an aging Vietnamese population

Reference:

Zimmer, Z., Fraser, K., Korinek, K., Akbulut-Yuksel, & M., Toan, T. K., (2020, April 23). War across the life course: Examining the impact of conflict exposure on a comprehensive inventory of health measures in an aging Vietnamese population. Paper accepted for the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Washington, D.C.

Abstract:

Background: The majority of evidence indicates that exposure to war and other traumatic events may continue to have negative impacts on health across the life course. However, existing research on the health effects of wartime exposure primarily concentrates on short-term impacts among veterans in high income countries sent elsewhere to battle. Yet, most wars situate in lower and middle income countries, where many are now in or will soon be entering old age. Consequently, the current burden of wartime exposure has ignored an important global population. **Methods:** The 2018 Vietnam Health and Aging Study (VHAS) was specifically designed to examine historical exposure to highly stressful events during the American War. We generate indexed measures of war exposure and analyze their associations with a set of 16 health outcomes, accounting for confounding variables. **Results:** Results indicate that greater wartime exposure in the past is associated with worse long-term health across a large number of individual health outcomes in older age, such as diagnosed health condition comorbidity, mental distress, somatic symptoms, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and chronic pain. **Conclusions:** These findings support a life course theory of health, provide a foundation for future VHAS studies, and point to long-term effects of war on health that require detailed attention.