Role Transition Sequencing and Outcomes for Women in Later Life

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Prior research on men has found that there is a structured life course and that men who complete role transitions in a socially expected order have better outcomes later in life.

Since very little research has been done to assess the normative role transition sequencing for women, we ask:

- Has the life course for women become more or less standardized over the past century?
- Do women who complete role transitions in a socially expected order have better outcomes later in life?

HYPOTHESES

- White women will be more likely to have made the transitions in the normative order than women of color.
- Women in earlier birth cohorts will be more likely to have made the transitions in the normative order than women in later birth cohorts.
- Women who made transitions in the normative order will have better outcomes in later life.

DATA

- Information for this survey is collected from 10,008 adults (19 and over), nationally.
- The sample for this research consists of 1,702 women, 50 and older, who completed all three transitions.
- Better physical and mental health and higher individual income are considered as more desirable outcomes for this research.

RESULTS

- The average age of the sample was 65 years old.
- The majority of the women were white.
- Less than 1/2 of the women were born in the two earlier birth cohorts.
- The majority of women completed each transition in the socially expected order.
- Normative transition order sequencing, being from an earlier birth cohort, having more education, still working and being married are related to having better physical health.
- Role transition sequencing is not related to mental health.
- More transitions made in the normative order are related to higher income later in life.

CONCLUSIONS

- White women were more likely to make role transitions in a socially expected sequence than women of color.
- Women in the earlier birth cohorts were more likely to make the transitions in the socially expected order than women in the later birth cohorts.
- Women who made the transitions in the socially expected sequence are more likely to have better outcomes in later life.
- Overall, the life course has become less structured.
- This research shows that less structure, however, may lead to less desirable outcomes in later life.