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# Health inequalities among older men and women in Africa and Asia: evidence from eight Health and Demographic Surveillance System sites in the INDEPTH WHO-SAGE Study

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**Objectives:** To determine the extent to which demographic and socio-economic factors impact upon measures of health in older populations in Africa and Asia; to examine sex differences in health and further explain how these differences can be attributed to demographic and socio-economic determinants.

**Methods :** A total of 46,269 individuals aged 50 years and over in eight Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) sites within the INDEPTH Network were studied during 2006–2007 using an abbreviated version of the WHO Study on global AGEing and adult health (SAGE) Wave I instrument. The survey data were then linked to longitudinal HDSS background information. A health score was calculated based on self-reported health derived from eight health domains. Multivariable regression and post-regression decomposition provide ways of measuring and explaining the health score gap between men and women.

**Results:** Older men have better self-reported health than older women. Differences in household socio-economic levels, age, education levels, marital status and living arrangements explained from about 82% and 71% of the gaps in health score observed between men and women in South Africa and Kenya, respectively, to almost nothing in Bangladesh. Different health domains contributed differently to the overall health scores for men and women in each country.

**Conclusions:** The findings suggest that self-reported health in low- and middle-income countries is strongly influenced by demographic and socio-economic factors. The findings suggest that sex differences in health are not solely due to biological differences but are also influenced by social and economic factors. The findings suggest that the health of older populations is a complex issue that requires a multi-sectoral approach. The findings suggest that the health of older populations is a complex issue that requires a multi-sectoral approach. The findings suggest that the health of older populations is a complex issue that requires a multi-sectoral approach.

**Access to data:** The data are available in the form of a questionnaire (including demographic and health data) and a dataset of health scores.

(see Supplementary files under Reading Tools online). To obtain a password for the dataset, please send a request with ‘SAGE data’ as its subject, detailing how you propose to use the data, to [global.health@epiph.umu.se](mailto:global.health@epiph.umu.se)

- ageing
- survey methods
- public health
- burden of disease
- demographic transition
- disability
- well-being
- health status
- INDEPTH WHO-SAGE

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