

Title: Til' Death Do Us Part: Widowhood, Loneliness, and Healthcare Utilization

Abstract:

Population aging has presented many new challenges and opportunities, including addressing the complex relationship between health and social factors such as loneliness. Deepening our understanding of healthcare consumption is crucial, particularly for the aging population, which represents the largest share of healthcare utilization. We use data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) to explore the causal effect of one source of loneliness on healthcare utilization, widowhood. We find that widowhood decreases preventative healthcare utilization and preventative health behaviors and increases formal healthcare utilization. We estimate the cost of widowhood for formal healthcare utilization alone is over \$11 billion per year. The observed decreases in preventative healthcare and preventative health behaviors may be contributory factors to the widowhood effect. Keywords: Healthcare utilization, aging population, widowhood, loneliness