



SEMINAR

Defining Lifelong Singlehood Among Middle-Aged and Older Europeans

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Measuring lifelong singlehood has become increasingly challenging due to the growing complexity of partnership histories. Using life history data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, we compare three definitions of lifelong singlehood: never married (legal), never married and never cohabited (coresidential), and never married, never cohabited, and never partnered (relationship). Prevalence of lifelong singlehood ranged from 10% to 5% among men and 7% to 3% among women, depending on the definition applied, with substantial cross-national variation. The association between sociodemographic characteristics (education, age, and country of birth) and well-being outcomes (quality of life, depressive symptoms, and self-rated health) also varied by definition. How singlehood is defined therefore shapes our understanding of its prevalence and sociodemographic and well-being correlates among older Europeans. Future research should carefully consider which definition to apply and its implications for policy debates.



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