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Is nursing home demand affected by the decline in age difference between spouses?

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Abstract

We investigate whether declines in the age difference between spouses has influenced widowhood and nursing home demand. We first use life-table methods to simulate the impact of the declining age gap on the risk of widowhood. We then use the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey and the Census Public Use Microdata Samples to estimate the impact of widowhood, and other characteristics, on the probability of nursing home entrance. These help us estimate the impact of the declining age gap on nursing home use. We estimate that the decline in the difference in ages between spouses that took place between the birth cohorts of 1900 and 1955 may raise women's annual nursing home expenditures by about \$1.4 billion, but lower men's expenditures by about \$600 million.

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