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Women's Spousal Choices and a Man's Handshake: Evidence from a Norwegian Study of Cohort Differences

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Abstract

Both high grip strength and being married independently relate to better functional capacity and health at older ages, but the combined effect of marital status and strength have not been investigated. Especially at older ages, declining strength can have adverse health and social consequences, where having a spouse could potentially help with everyday support and alleviate some of the negative effects of sarcopenia. We investigate how grip strength relates to being married among two cohorts of 59-71 year olds (born 1923-35 and 1936-48) in the Norwegian city of Tromsø, controlling for a broad set of health variables and sociodemographic characteristics. The baseline included N=5009 participants of whom 649 died during follow-up. We find that for men, particularly among younger cohorts, the physically stronger are more likely to be married, but no relation is found for women. This is consistent with a hypothesis that women increasingly have selected male marital partners based on preferred individual traits, whereas men do not emphasize strength when selecting women. We find that both marital status and grip strength independently affect mortality, but there is no significant joint effect. However, the distribution of strength and marital status

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