

Spanish study: Women live longer but in worse condition

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The double burden of work that women experience throughout their lives is a key factor in explaining this difference in different studies. Credit: SINC

Although women have a longer life expectancy, they experience a much greater prevalence of disability in old age than men do. This is the main conclusion of the study published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Women's Health*.

"We focused on a [socioeconomic position](#) factor such as educational level and health factors such as limitations to daily activity. By studying this relationship we were able to see the social inequalities in dependency", Albert Espelt, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Public Health Agency of Barcelona, tells SINC.

The study is based on the health surveys that have been carried out in

Barcelona by the Public Health Agency since 1982. "These are representative of the non-institutionalised population living in Barcelona", explains the expert. In total, the team interviewed 4,244 people aged above 64 (893 in 1992, 2,140 in 2000 and 1,211 in 2006).

"We saw differences in limitations according to socioeconomic position, which remained steady over the course of time", the expert points out.

The prevalence of disability in people aged over 64 increased among [women](#) in Catalonia between 1992 and 2006, but not among men, due to the increase in female [life expectancy](#). The prevalence of disability in 2006 was 30% among men and 53% in women. In other words, it increases among the most elderly women.

"The double burden of work that women experience throughout their lives (domestic work and work outside the home) is a key factor in explaining this difference in different studies", says Espelt. Domestic work is less rewarding than working outside the home, and leads to a greater prevalence of non-fatal diseases such as musculoskeletal problems and [depression](#).

Fewer inequalities with the Law of Dependency?

The Law to Promote Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent People governs the basic conditions for ensuring equality in personal autonomy and care for dependent people.

"In this sense, the law approved in 2006 has represented a step forward in recognising a new universal right for citizens. Now it is to be hoped that this law will help to reduce the social inequalities that we found in our study", points out the researcher.

"It is still too soon to demonstrate the impact of the 2006 law", says

Espelt. The [Public Health](#) Agency of Barcelona is already designing a new health survey for 2011, which will include the same questions as the previous one.

More information: Albert Espelt, Laia Font-Ribera, Maica Rodríguez-Sanz, Lucia Artazcoz, Josep Ferrando, Aina Plaza, Carme Borrell, "Disability Among Older People in a Southern European City in 2006: Trends in Gender and Socioeconomic Inequalities", Journal of womens health 19 (5): 927-933, May 2010.

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