

# Surprising result in new study of marital status, gender, and frailty

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The well-accepted association between marital status, health, and risk of functional impairment in older individuals is generally true, but a new study on frailty found unexpected, gender-specific differences. Notably, widowed women had a lower risk of frailty than did married women, according to the study published in *Journal of Women's Health*.

Caterina Trevisan, MD and coauthors from University of Padova and the National Research Council's Institute of Neuroscience, Padova (Italy) predicted that unmarried elderly people would have a higher risk of becoming frail than their married peers. Marital status has traditionally been associated with reduced risk of disability and death. For this study, the researchers evaluated a group of men and women >65 years of age for more than 4 years.

The authors' prediction held true for elderly men, with those never married or widowed having a higher risk of developing frailty. However, widowed women had a significantly lower risk of becoming frail than did [married women](#), according to the findings reported in "Marital Status and Frailty in Older People: Gender Differences in the Progetto Veneto Anziani Longitudinal Study". The authors identify the factors contributing to frailty that were more influenced by marital status.

"This study adds to our understanding of how [marital status](#) influences the onset of [frailty](#) in [older people](#), but reveals surprising gender-specific differences," says Susan G. Kornstein, MD, Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Women's Health*, Executive Director of the Virginia Commonwealth University Institute for Women's Health, Richmond, VA, and President of the Academy of Women's Health.

**More information:** Caterina Trevisan et al, Marital Status and Frailty in Older People: Gender Differences in the Longitudinal Study, *Journal of Women's Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1089/jwh.2015.5592](https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2015.5592)

Provided by Mary Ann Liebert, Inc

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