The Effect of Disability on Life Satisfaction and Self-Rated Health:

Resilience is Not the Prototypical Pattern

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Abstract
Development is a multi-directional and multi-dimensional process. Disability is a major life stressor that affects one’s developmental trajectory. Relatively little is known, however, regarding the role that disability has on domains beyond that of life satisfaction, such as self-rated health and whether individuals display differential trajectories or patterns of change to and from disability. To examine this further, we applied growth mixture modeling to 4,155 (M_age = 60, SD = 14, 48% women) individuals from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study who experienced disability over the course of the study. We observed different patterns of changes in life satisfaction and self-rated health to and from disability. Four patterns of how life satisfaction changed were identified: resilient (14%), mildly impacted (50%), low and declining (29%), and system breakdown (7%). We observed three patterns for self-rated health: system breakdown (12%), low and declining (50%), and chronic low (38%). Factors associated with greater likelihood of resilience (high stable levels) for life satisfaction were older age, being a man, being better educated, less severe disability, and greater social participation. Factors associated with greater likelihood of system breakdown group for self-rated health were younger age, being better educated, and greater social participation. Our findings underlies that major life stressors shape developmental trajectories differently depending on the domain of functioning (e.g., life satisfaction versus self-rated health). Furthermore, the results suggest that recent calls that resilience being the norm when confronted with major life stressors does not extend to health stressors, such as disability. Our discussion focuses on possible reasons why resilience may not be the norm when confronted with disability, factors to consider when building resilience-promoting interventions, and future research targeting domains beyond that of well-being when examining the role of major life stressors in shaping the course of development.

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