Life expectancy/Expert

Globally, men and women differ in terms of life expectancy. In 186 of 191 countries, men die earlier than women. Although average life expectancy is increasing every year, women still live longer than men. Undoubtedly, the causes of this sexual dimorphism are multifactorial and have been studied from both a sociological and biological perspective. The difference in life expectancy varies considerably. In most industrialized countries, women have six to eight years longer life expectancy than men. In Sweden, however, this average difference is only four years. By contrast, men in Russia live on average 13 years shorter than women. A decisive role is attributed to cultural differences, which have a significant influence on gender roles and can increase or decrease life expectancy (in Russia, excessive alcohol consumption is part of the stereotypically male role). [1] However, biological factors (genes and sex hormones) also prevent male and female life expectancy from matching. [2]

Concrete causes for the higher average life expectancy of women are being explored in numerous studies. Many of these explanations relate to health behavior (e.g. nicotine and alcohol consumption), a riskier lifestyle, more physically hazardous work, the level of stress and violence on the part of men. Also, gender aspects play an important role. In the course of female empowerment, women's lifestyles have changed (e.g. smoking habits and more hazardous and stressful work) and thus differences in life expectancy should at least partially disappear. In addition to external social factors, however, differences in biological sex play an important role, too: both genetic factors and sex hormones seem to be involved. A key genetic factor is the inactivation of one of the two X chromosomes in the female cells. As a positive outcome, dysfunctional genes may lead to repression and favorable genes to expression. With regard to the sex hormones, the estrogen level seems to keep the female body in a better condition and, among other things, lead to a longer functioning of the immune system. Sex hormones can influence this in two ways: through structural effects that occur during critical periods in the development of the human body (such as fetal development, early childhood and puberty). There are also temporal effects, which occur due to an increase in hormonal levels and decrease as hormone levels decrease. These hormonal differences ultimately lead to a more favorable outcome for women in areas such as immune function, oxidative stress response and antioxidant status, lipoprotein metabolism, fat storage and stress response via the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal cortex) axis. A combination of these factors can then form a determinant for the higher life expectancy of women. An alignment of life expectancy between men and women cannot be presumed. [3] Rather, an increasing feminization of the ageing population can be expected, which will have far-reaching consequences for society. [4]

Literature

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