ABSTRACT

The relationship between the novel onset and persistence of two illnesses - coronary heart disease and arthritis - and an individual’s current level of depressive symptoms is examined. The data source used is the University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a nationally representative longitudinal survey of adults in the United States over the age of 50. Depressive Symptoms are measured with an 8 item scale known as the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D). Gender and marital status are examined as effect modifiers of the impact of illness on depressive symptoms.

Using Generalized Linear Latent and Mixed Effects Models (GLLAMM), the outcome of interest, CES-D is modeled using an ordinal logit framework with random effects, using maximum likelihood estimation.

The results indicate that the novel onset and persistence of heart disease and arthritis significantly impact an individual’s current level of depressive symptoms. It is also seen that the effects of these stressors do not diminish with time. There is suggestive evidence that females may react less strongly in terms of depressive symptoms to novel heart disease than males and that married individuals are somewhat protected against depressive symptoms with the onset of novel arthritis.