

Ethnic/racial inequalities in later life. What can we learn from the UK?

Abstract

There is very little research evidence available on the experiences of older ethnic minority/migrant people in developed countries, in part because of the shortage of available data. However, the evidence we have suggests that ethnic minority people experience significant social and economic inequalities throughout their lives and that these inequalities are greatest post-retirement. In this paper I will use the evidence from the UK to describe the patterning of ethnic inequalities in health, social and economic outcomes in later life, and go on to examine the processes that might lead to these inequalities. In doing so, I will address life course mechanisms relating to enduring critical period/early life effects, cumulative advantage and disadvantage over the life course, and fragmented or disrupted life course trajectories. I will place a discussion of these mechanisms within a broader framework that considers differences across generations (first generation migrant, second generation migrant, etc.), periods, and cohorts. And more generally I will examine evidence of persisting experiences of racism, discrimination and inequality and how these shape the life course. I will conclude with a discussion of the policy and practice implications of this evidence.