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Ageism and sexism in Portuguese NHS hospitals: differences in treatment of patients with acute myocardial infarction based on age and sex

César Carneiro [1]

[1] Entidade Reguladora da Saúde, Porto, PORTUGAL

Contact: ccarneiro@ers.pt

Objectivos (Objectives): In this essay we address the theme of discrimation of patients on the basis of gender and age. We analyze the impact of sex and age of patients in the probability of receiving intensive treatment for Acute Myocardial Infarction (AMI) within Portuguese NHS hospitals.

Metodologia (Methodology): We use data from 89,026 discharge records of NHS hospitals between 2000 and 2008. We control for the severity of patients with a Disease Staging classification and perform a logistic regression analysis to determine whether there is a significant association between sex and age of a patient admitted with diagnosis of AMI and the type of treatment he or she receives. We also conduct a receiver operating characteristics analysis to quantify some of the consequences of the disparities found between the treatment given to men and women. Finally, we present an empirical test of statistical discrimination as the underlying mechanism for the discrimination of women, based on interaction effects estimation.

Resultados (Results): We found that older patients and females are less likely to receive an intensive treatment for AMI than younger and male patients. We estimate that 52% of the female patients of our sample were undertreated according to the standard of treatment applied to men, a rate that is 15 percentage points higher than in men. We also observe that undertreated women had a higher probability of death than other females not treated. Finally, we found that the magnitude of sex based discrimination in AMI treatment depends on if the hospital was subject to a corporatization shift by which financial and performance incentives were imposed to some NHS hospitals in Portugal.

Conclusões (Conclusions): We found evidence indicating that women are discriminated againt in portuguese NHS hospitals, in what concerns the treatment of AMI. Our results also suggest that statistical discrimination may be one of the underlying mechanisms for the discrimination of women.