Stress across the life course and associations to late-life cognitive and physical function: Which modifiable social and lifestyle factors affects the association?

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With a rapidly growing older population, it is important to identify factors that influence function in older age. Late-life function reflects different environmental and personal exposures experienced over the life. Long-term stress is an important factor that impacts function, yet little is known about its role throughout the life course. Longitudinal data will be used to investigate how exposure to different kind of stressors (experiences that might cause stress) across the life course are associated with function in older age. Both age-based and life-long stressors will be assessed: (1) childhood e.g. family conflicts and family illnesses, (2) adulthood e.g. work stressors, marital conflicts, widowhood, and unemployment, and (3) stressors that may play a role from childhood to older age, e.g. financial strain. Outcomes: Physical function (tests of strength, motion, grip strength, lung function, and self-reported mobility) and cognitive function measured through various cognitive domains such as memory and executive function. Importantly, we will also study how modifiable social factors like social networks and support, and modifiable health behaviors like sleep disturbances, exercise, diet, smoking, and alcohol consumption, can negatively or positively impact these associations and promote resilience. The results will support practical recommendations that can be implemented at strategic points in the life course on stress-buffering factors to promote healthy aging.