PREMATURE MORTALITY AND THE PERPETUATION OF INEQUALITY

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Political participation is one important way to influence the decision-making process that affects the policies and programs that in turn affect the survivability of individuals. This observation is critical because the dead cannot vote or voice their political opinions. Further, the non-poor enjoy a large survival advantage over the poor, meaning that the non-poor—who have very different needs and interests from the poor—have more political years to participate in politics than the poor to influence the policy-making process on their favor. This paper shows how the early disappearing of the poor, and of racial minorities,maintains the status quo and perpetuates inequality in the United States. To do this, we use propensity scores matching statistical methods to analyze data from MIDUS I (Midlife in the United States: A National Study of Health and Well-being) and its 10-year mortality follow up. Results show that the health differences between people who die and don't die in a 10-year period explained 56% of their political participation differences. Survivors participate at higher levels than non-survivors in all age groups and socioeconomic levels; without detrimental differences in health between survivors and future non-survivors, political participation would increase by 28%. We notice the same poor individuals whose increased participation would pressure for redistributive policies are those who die off from the available pool of participants at much higher rates than socioeconomically advantaged individuals. Our conceptual model helps to explain how, through the early disappearance of the poor, continuing political participation of non-poor survivors helps to perpetuate inequality in the status quo.