

New Paper looks at why gaps in life expectancy by socio-economic group have widened over the past 20 years

- People in higher socio-economic groups are living increasingly longer than those in lower socio-economic groups
- The difference in male life expectancy at age 65 by socio-economic group has widened by 1.2 years over past 20 years
- The difference in male life expectancy at birth by socio-economic group has increased from 4.9 years to 5.8 years in the past 20 years

Research drawn together by the Longevity Science Advisory Panel, "***Life Expectancy; past and future variations by socio-economic group in England & Wales***", has examined why, despite the efforts of successive Governments to narrow the gap in life expectancy, the difference continues to widen. The study highlighted that at age 65, men in the highest socio-economic group in England and Wales are living longer than those in the lowest socio-economic group by up to 3.5 years, increasing from a gap of 2.3 years twenty years earlier.

20 years ago, a man born into a higher socio-economic group would be expected to live on average 75.6 years, 4.9 years more than a person in the lower category. Today, a man born into a higher socio-economic group is expected to live 80.4 years, 5.8 years longer than a man in the lower socio-economic group.

The research shows that there are powerful influences increasing the gaps and future attempts to gauge the success of efforts made to narrow them will need to recognise how powerful those factors remain. The findings reflect growing inequality in socio-economic groups by income and lifestyle variations, which are contributing to increasing, rather than reducing, the gap in life expectancy.

Income inequality has increased since the 1980s. For example, the average household income of the wealthiest tenth of the population in England and Wales was 3 times that of the poorest tenth, in the 1960s and 1970s. This ratio then climbed from 3 to 4 times in the 1980s and has stayed around 4 since 1990s*

Differences in lifestyle such as smoking and obesity, between the socio-economic groups, are still disadvantaging those in lower socio-economic groups. For example, in 2009, 16% of non-manual workers smoked compared with 26% of manual workers and the level of smoking was much higher in manual groups, who on average smoke 15 cigarettes per day compared with the average of 10 cigarettes smoked by those in the higher professional group

Smoking: Smoking is still one of the biggest causes of death and illness in the UK. An estimated 114,000 people die every year from smoking related illnesses and smokers have an increased risk of developing over 50 serious health conditions.

Alcohol: A 2011 NHS study concluded that in 2009 there were over 6500 deaths in England directly attributed to alcohol. The mortality rates are higher for those in lower socio-economic groups. For example, men aged 30-44 in routine occupations were roughly 7 times more likely to die from alcohol related causes than men in the same age group but in higher managerial and professional occupations.

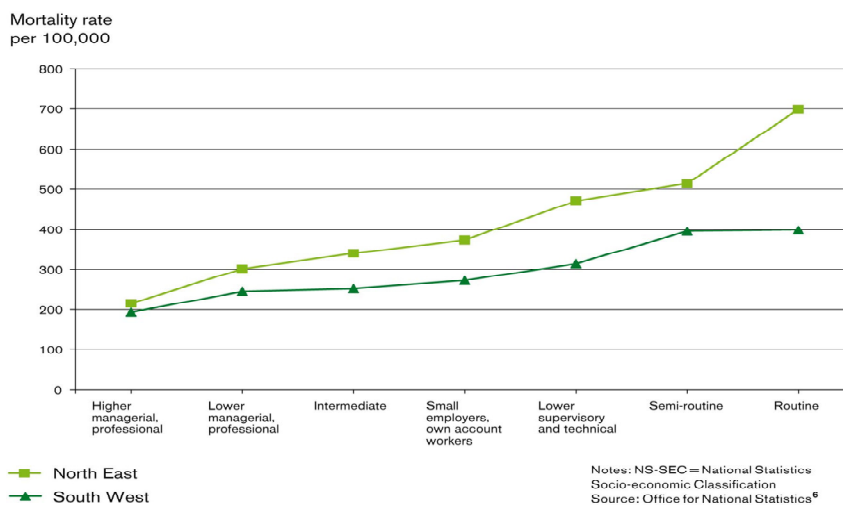
Obesity: In 2009, 60% of the adult population in England were classified as being overweight or obese. 38% had a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25-<30 and 25% were obese with BMI 30 and above.

Obesity can result in serious chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes. For example, an obese women is nearly 13 times more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes than a woman who is not obese. People classified as severely obese (BMI 40 to 50) can expect their life expectancy to be shortened by 10 years. In 2004, obesity among men in the professional socio-economic group was 18% compared with 28% for those in the unskilled manual class.

These factors are all contributing to the widening difference in mortality rates between socio-economic groups as illustrated in the chart below.

Age standardised mortality rates by socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC) in the North East and South West regions, men aged 25-64, 2001-03

Figure 2 Age standardised mortality rates by socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC) in the North East and South West regions, men aged 25-64, 2001-2003



Source: Reproduced from Figure 2. Age standardised mortality rates by socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC) in the North East and South West regions, men aged 25-64, 2001-2003. Fair Society, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review: Executive Summary, p.11. (<http://www.marmotreview.org/AssetLibrary/pdfs/Reports/FairSocietyHealthyLivesExecSummary.pdf>)
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Sir Derek Wanless. Chair of the Longevity Science Advisory Panel commenting on the Report findings, said: “Our research has shown that there are some powerful factors that have influenced and are likely to continue to influence life expectancy in different socio-economic groups. The gap between the socio-economic groups will continue to increase further rather than reduce if the ‘rich continue to get richer and the poor poorer’* unless action to change the lifestyle factors is more successful.

Our findings show that many of the factors that improve longevity are changing very slowly. Continuing efforts are being made, such as raising awareness of the risks of obesity and the associated health risks of smoking and alcohol consumption but we are unlikely to see whether they are having an impact and narrowing the gap in life expectancy between socio-economic groups for quite a long time. For example, manual workers have been 1.5 times more likely to smoke than non-manual workers since the 1990s and despite successive anti-smoking campaigns this has still not changed substantially.**

The hypothesis that inequality in improvements in life expectancy will not narrow seems a reasonable starting point for forecasting.”

More/...

Sir Derek Wanless continued: “Recognising the impact that future key developments in emerging science, public health and health services could have for the different socio-economic groups will hopefully help to start narrowing the longevity gap. This is why we chose an analysis of improvements in longevity by socio-economic group as the first study by the Longevity Science Advisory Group. Essentially we’ve drawn together the relevant available information so that we, and other interested parties, are able to gain a more informed view of the socio-economic variations in life expectancy and as a result a more accurate assessment of potential future trends.

Preparing for a future where more people live longer is one of society's greatest challenges. The differences in life expectancy by socio-economic group have continued to widen, despite the efforts of successive Governments to narrow the gap. By providing a better understanding of the long-term impact on social and economic issues such as health and care services as well as on the provision of pensions, annuities and insurance, people should be in a better position to address that challenge.

Hopefully this paper will stimulate comment and further work which can be used to create a better understanding and improved forecasting.

Our second study will look at the changes occurring in life expectancy by gender where interesting changes are being seen.”

A copy of the Report, **Life Expectancy; Past and future variations by socio-economic groups in England and Wales**, is available to download at www.longevitypanel.co.uk/le-by-seg or by requesting a copy to longevity@landg.com. Ends

Journalists wanting further information or to arrange an interview with Sir Derek Wanless, Chair of the Longevity Science Advisory Panel or another member of the panel should contact:

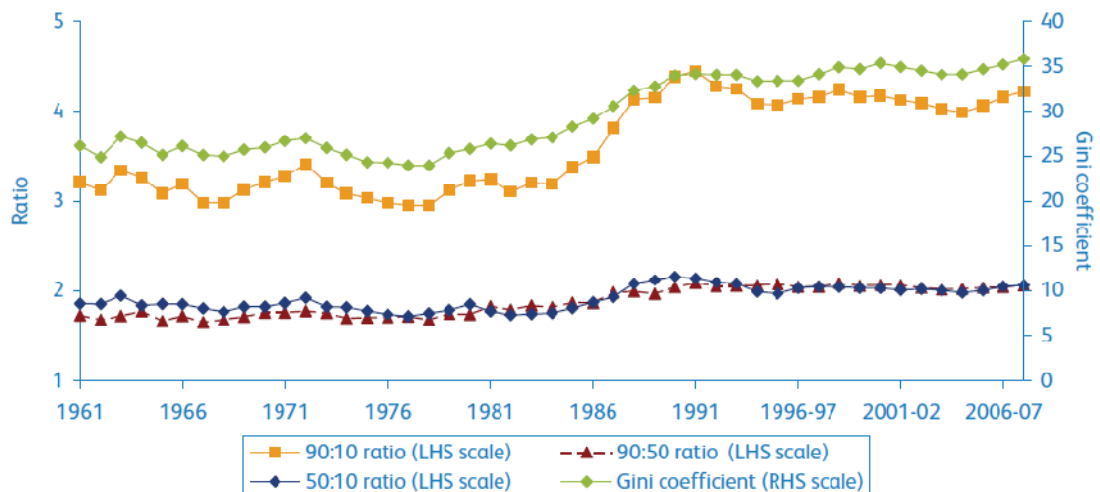
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Notes to editors

Sources:

Difference in average household income by socio-economic group over time is as noted in the report – Section 3.2 of ‘Life Expectancy; past and future variations by socio-economic group in England and Wales’. Figure 16, p.18 shown below

Figure 16: Changes in overall income inequality measures (Households Below Average Income definition*), 1961 to 2007-08



*Department for Work and Pensions Household Below Average Income (HBAI) statistics presents information regarding living standards within the UK.

Source: Reproduced from Figure 2.13. Changes in overall income inequality measures (HBAI definition), 1961 to 2007-08. An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK. Report of the National Equality Panel. National Equality Panel, 2010, p.39. (<http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEREport60.pdf>). © Crown Copyright 2010. This information is licensed under the terms of the Open Government License v1.0 (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/open-government-licence.htm>)

** Figures/ ref in Report to demonstrate the impact of smoking refer to Section 3.4 of 'Life Expectancy; past and future variations by social-economic group in England and Wales'. Table 8.

***The rich get richer and the poor get poorer**

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said the poor will suffer disproportionately from the Chancellor's failure to increase tax credits and will not benefit to the same extent as the better off from the council tax freeze and the delay of fuel duty increases as the overall effect of the Treasury's latest economic measures will be to reduce the incomes of the bottom 30pc of earners and benefit those in the top 60pc.

The Life Expectancy; past and future variations by social-economic group in England and Wales is based on the opinions express by the authors and is available for general information only.

The Longevity Science Advisory Panel, LSAP, was set up by Legal & General to explore the impact that a range of factors may have on future life expectancy in the UK. This includes the drivers that are enhancing life expectancy, for example, medical advances and social change, as well as the inhibitors, such as aspects of lifestyle and delays in the development of treatments. The panel is chaired by Sir Derek Wanless and also consist of Sir John Pattison, Klim McPherson, Steve Haberman and Colin Blakemore.