

Disability free life expectancy and healthy life expectancy - do they tell the same story?

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Summary

The population of the UK is aging. At the same time the UK is renowned for health and mortality inequalities across the country and some studies suggest that this gap is widening. This study explores health inequalities in disability free live expectancy (DFLE) and healthy life expectancy (HLE). We identify socio-economic and socio-demographic factors explaining the variation in HLE and DFLE across England in 2001 and whether they affect DFLE and HLE the same way. In addition, we explore how inequality within a local area affects the overall health expectancy of an area; our hypothesis is that unequal areas are more health disadvantaged than more equal areas.

KEYWORDS: Health expectancy, Health inequality, England

Understanding health expectancy inequalities across local areas

Like most populations worldwide, the population of the UK is aging, with more people living longer. At the same time the UK is renowned for health and mortality inequalities across the country, specifically a North South divide, with the Northern population generally having lower life expectancy compared to the population in the South. Consecutive governments have attempted to tackle this inequality with little success and recent research suggests that the gap across the UK is actually widening.

In an aging population, health expectancy is the preferred population health indicator. Health expectancy combines morbidity and mortality experience of a population, thus adding a quality aspect to the quantity of life.

This study explores health inequalities in disability free live expectancy (DFLE) and healthy life expectancy (HLE). We identify socio-economic and socio-demographic factors explaining the variation in HLE and DFLE across England in 2001 and whether they affect DFLE and HLE the same way. In addition, we explore how inequality within a local area affects the overall health expectancy of an area; our hypothesis is that unequal areas are more health disadvantaged than more equal areas. Lastly we explore the impact of social diversity of an area on the inequality gradient. The question here is: Does local area social diversity affect health and if so, does it lead to a healthier community?

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Life expectancy, disability free life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in England in 2001

DFLE measures how long a person on average can expect to live free of a disability. HLE, measures how long a person on average can expect to live healthy. Even though, both indicators measure health, they measure different concepts; DFLE focusses on conditions that hinder a person in being active in everyday life, HLE measures how healthy a person conceives to be. In Figure 1, a boxplot shows life expectancy (LE), DFLE and HLE for men (M) and women (F) across English local authorities in 2001. The variation in life expectancy across local areas in England varies far less compared to health expectancy measures. In addition DFLE is lower compared to HLE, telling us, that people live on average longer feeling healthy than they live without a disability.

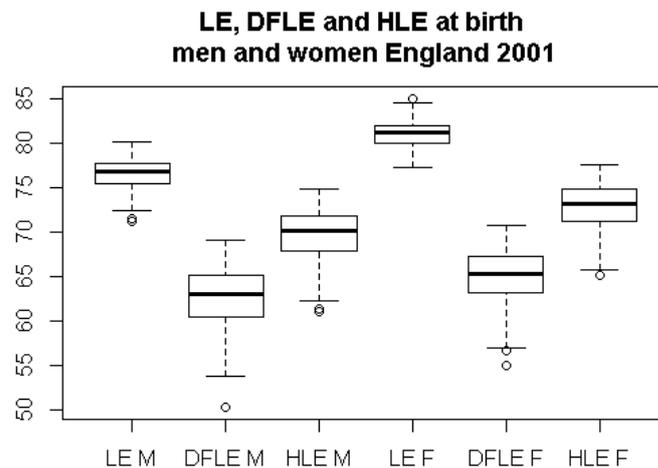


Figure 1 Boxplot of life expectancy (LE), disability free life expectancy (DFLE) and healthy life expectancy (HLE) for men (M) and Women (F) showing English local authority data 2001.

Our poster will discuss underlying socio-economic factors explaining these variations.

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Biography

Dr Pia Wohland is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Health and Society (IHS) and Newcastle University Institute for Ageing (NUIA). She has researched ethnic mortality and health differences for local areas in the UK and developed software for ethnic population projections.

Dr Seraphim Alvanides is a Reader in GI Science in the department of Architecture and Built Environment at Northumbria University. He is urban social geographer, with expertise in quantitative methods and Geographical Information Systems and Science (GIS/Sc).

Prof Carol Jagger holds the AXA Chair in Epidemiology of Ageing in the Institute of Health and Society and leads the theme on Ageing: economic and social impact within the Newcastle University Institute for Ageing (NUIA)