

Lifespan dispersion in times of life expectancy fluctuation: the case of Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Central and Eastern Europe have experienced considerable instability in mortality since the 1960s. Long periods of stagnating life expectancy were followed by rapid increases in life expectancy and in some cases even more rapid declines before more recent periods of improvement. These trends have been well documented but to date, no study has comprehensively explored trends in lifespan variation. We improve such analyses by incorporating life disparity as a health indicator alongside life expectancy. We analyzed how lifespan variation has changed since the 1960s for 12 countries from the region and determined the ages which have contributed the most to the observed variability in age at death. Furthermore, we quantified the effect of mortality related to alcohol consumption on life disparity since 1994. Our results showed that life disparity was high and strongly fluctuating over the time period. Life expectancy and life disparity moved independently from one another, particularly during periods of life expectancy stagnation. Fluctuations in mortality were, to a large extent, directly or partially attributable to changes in alcohol consumption. These trends run counter to the common patterns observed in most developed countries and contribute to the life expectancy-disparity discussion by showing that expansion/compression levels do not necessarily mean lower/higher life expectancy or mortality deterioration/improvements.