

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

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Abstract

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) 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, examining trends since the 1960s for 12 countries from the region. Generally life disparity was high and strongly fluctuating over the period. For nearly 30 of these years, life expectancy and life disparity moved independently from one another, largely because mortality trends ran in opposite directions over different ages. Furthermore, we quantified the impact of large classes of diseases on life disparity trends since 1994 using a newly harmonized cause of death time series for 8 countries in the region. Mortality patterns in CEE countries were heterogeneous and run counter to the common patterns observed in most developed countries. They 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.

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