

Despair and Dis Some Que

MORTAL Works

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Power of simple narrative

Our contribution was to link drug overdoses, suicides, and alcohol-related deaths, to show that **all were rising together**, that together they were **afflicting mostly whites**, and that among that group, the long fall in total mortality had stopped or reversed. We also chose the collective label “deaths of despair,” which helped publicize the combined epidemic and emphasize that it includes more than just drug overdose.

Is this narrative co

Artifact of selection?
Due to ‘deaths of
despair’?
Mechanisms?

**Adult life expectancy at age
graduates**

— Life expectancy without BA — L

60 years beyond age 25

58

56

54

52

50

48

1995

2000

Source: Authors' calculations using info
certificates from the National Vital Stat

Mortality increases largely confined to bottom 10th percentile of education.

Selection bias likely explains some of the e_{25} gap increase.

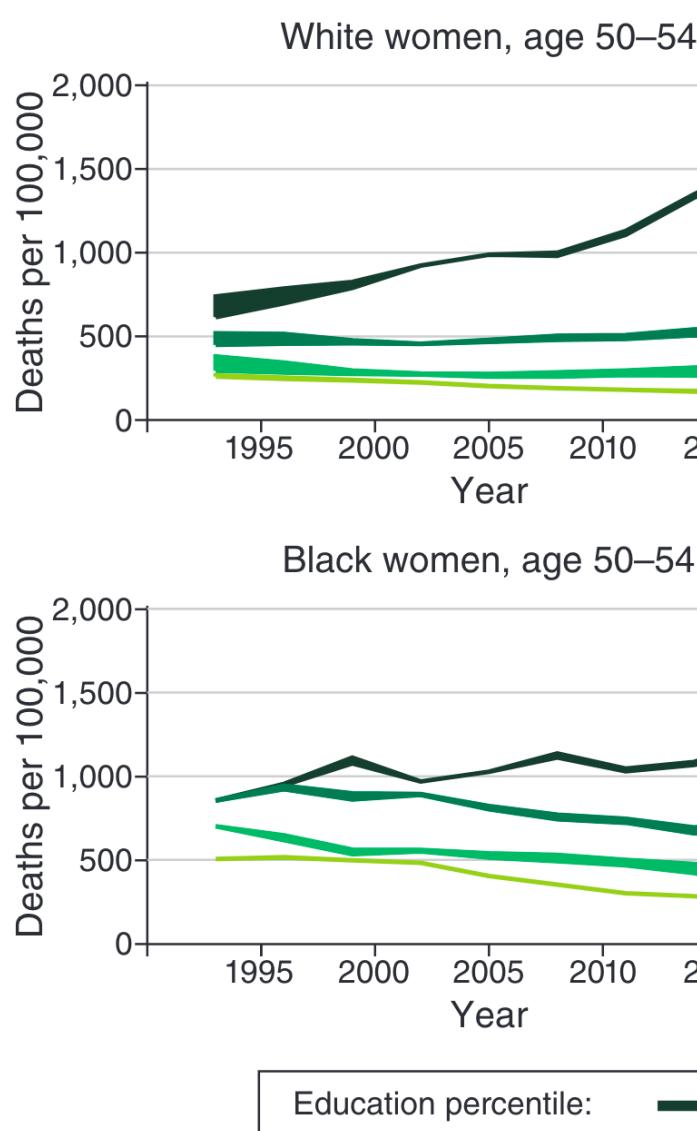
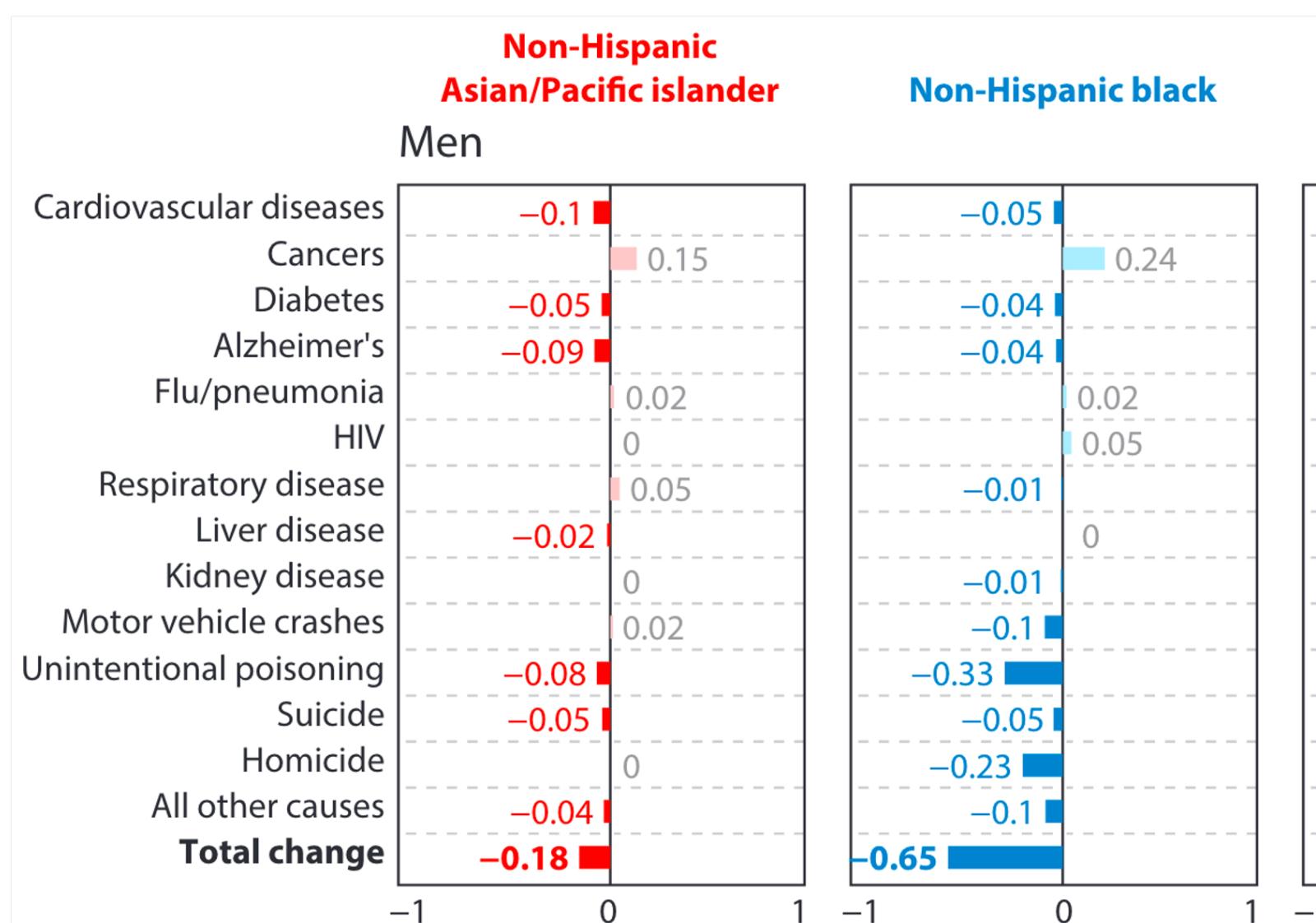


FIGURE 5. ALL-CAUSE MORTALITY RATE, AGE 50–54

Limited evidence for ‘deaths from despair’

- Not aligned with cause-specific deaths by race, age, and place.
- Weak spatial and temporal correlations between drug, alcohol, and suicide deaths.
- Declines in CVD also important for mortality slowdowns.
- Opioid overdose deaths largely responsible for trends.

Contributors to change in e_0 2014-2017,



- Much faster increases in opioid overdoses among Blacks *and* American Indian and Alaska Natives in recent years.
- Cannot be chiefly explained by the loss of economic opportunities among NH whites.

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Note: All r
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Source: C

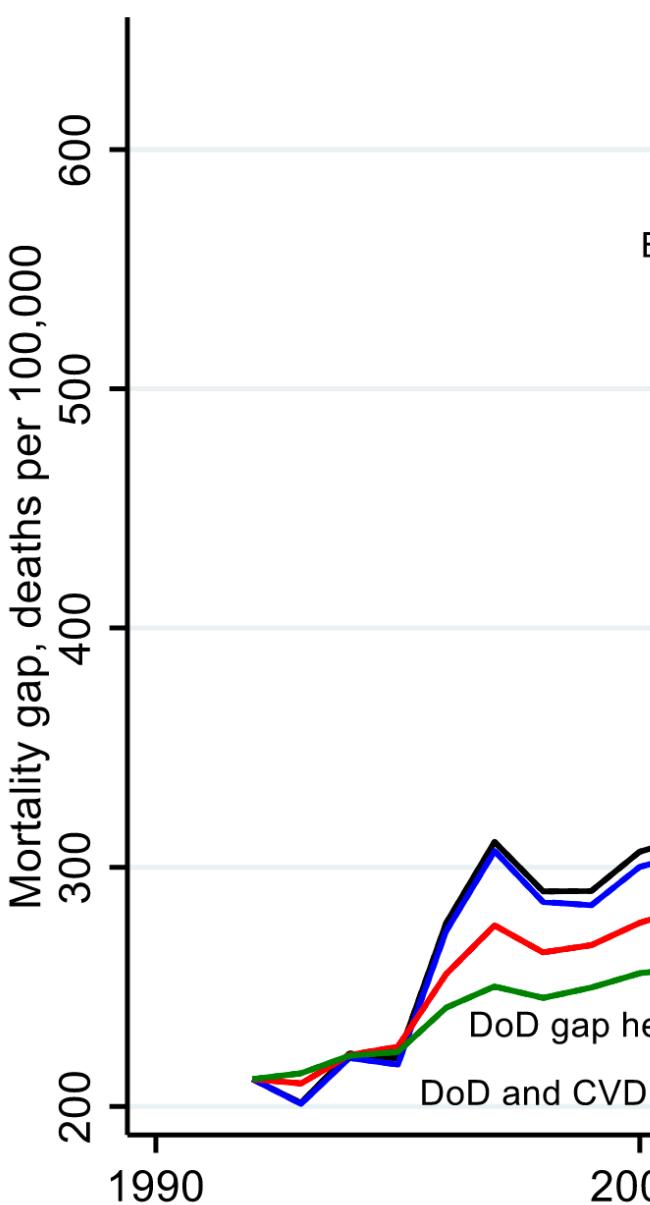
PEW RES

Table 2. Change in Years of Life Lost between Ages 25 and 84, by Race, Sex, Education, and Cause Files, Decennial Census, and American Community Survey.

	Non-Hispanic White Men								
	Low Ed			High Ed			Change in Gap	% Share of Total	1990
	1990	2015	Chg	1990	2015	Chg			
Opioids and other drugs	.29	1.57	1.28	.13	.63	.49	.79	24	
Non-drug suicide	.61	.82	.21	.37	.47	.10	.11	3	
Alcoholic liver	.22	.30	.07	.13	.16	.03	.04	1	
Total deaths of despair	1.12	2.68	1.56	.63	1.25	.62	.94	29	1
Cardiovascular disease	5.03	3.63	-1.39	4.14	2.13	-2.00	.61	19	5
Lung cancer	1.59	1.09	-.50	1.16	.54	-.61	.11	3	1
Other cancer	2.00	2.20	.20	2.09	1.61	-.48	.68	21	2
HIV	.31	.05	-.26	.39	.03	-.36	.09	3	1
Other infectious disease	.16	.35	.19	.13	.17	.05	.14	4	
Diabetes	.27	.45	.18	.21	.26	.04	.14	4	
Lower respiratory	.67	.81	.13	.43	.36	-.07	.20	6	
Kidney disease	.09	.18	.09	.06	.10	.04	.05	2	
Other liver	.16	.19	.02	.11	.09	-.02	.04	1	
Mental/behavioral	.08	.12	.04	.04	.08	.04	.00	0	
Other internal	1.35	1.88	.52	.98	1.09	.12	.41	12	2
Accidents/undetermined	1.26	1.09	-.17	.60	.54	-.07	-.10	-3	1
Homicide	.26	.16	-.10	.08	.05	-.03	-.07	-2	2
All other causes	.02	.03	.01	.02	.02	.00	.01	0	
Total	14.38	14.91	.53	11.07	8.34	-2.72	3.26		19

CVD and cancers
now part of the
story?

Age-adjusted 25-84 mortality gaps



What about de

Consequences of vague

Rising despair as fertile ground for abuse
self-soothing...

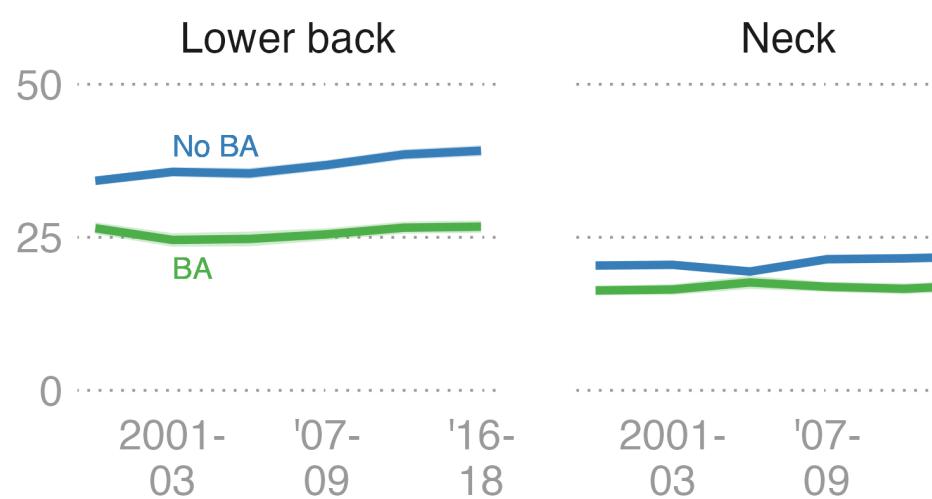
...broad consensus that [pain and despair]
have been increasing for decades...

...an ocean of pain and distress among
educated Americans

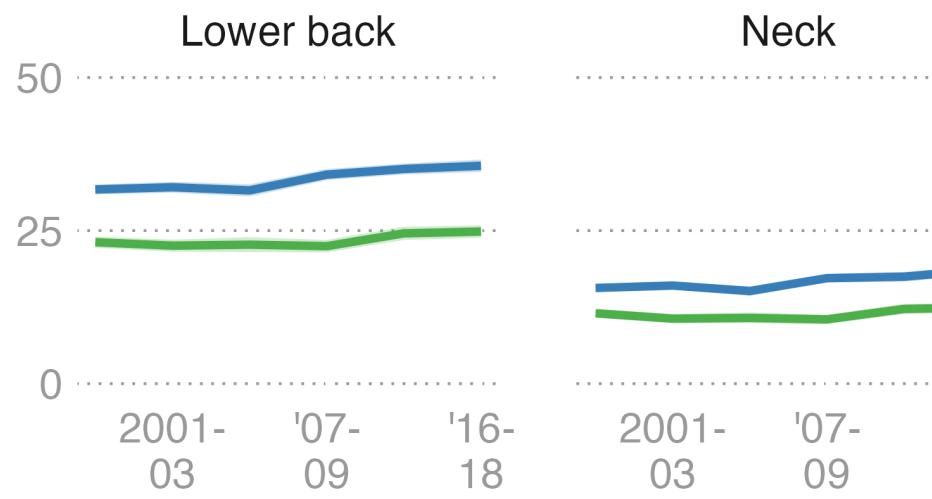
Is this an
'ocean' of
pain?
Can it drive
up mortality?

% adults ages 25+ reporting pain lasting a day

Women



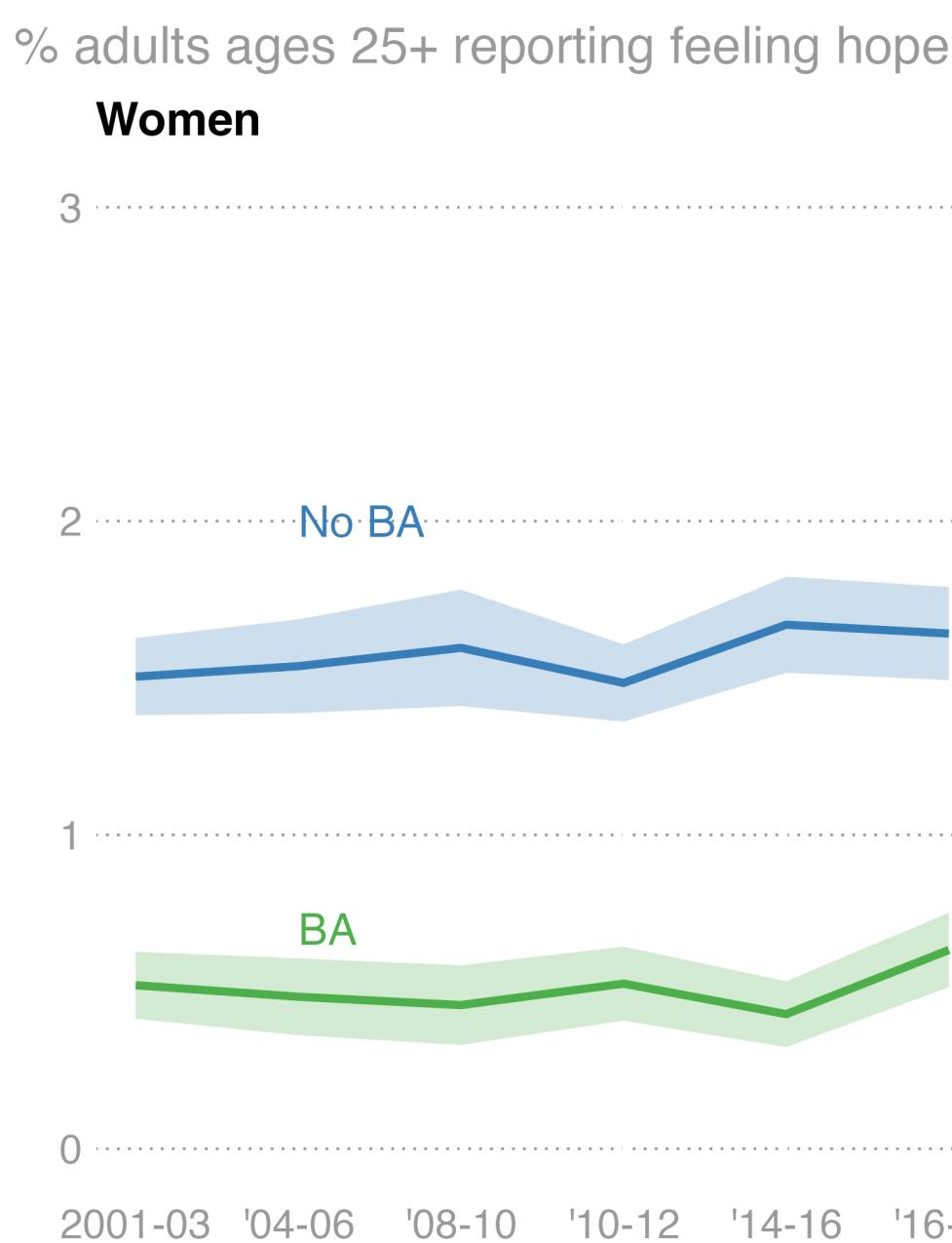
Men



Source: Author's calculations of NHIS. See also Zaiacova et

**Similarly flat
for ‘A little
or some’
hopelessness.**

**Few
differences
by race.**

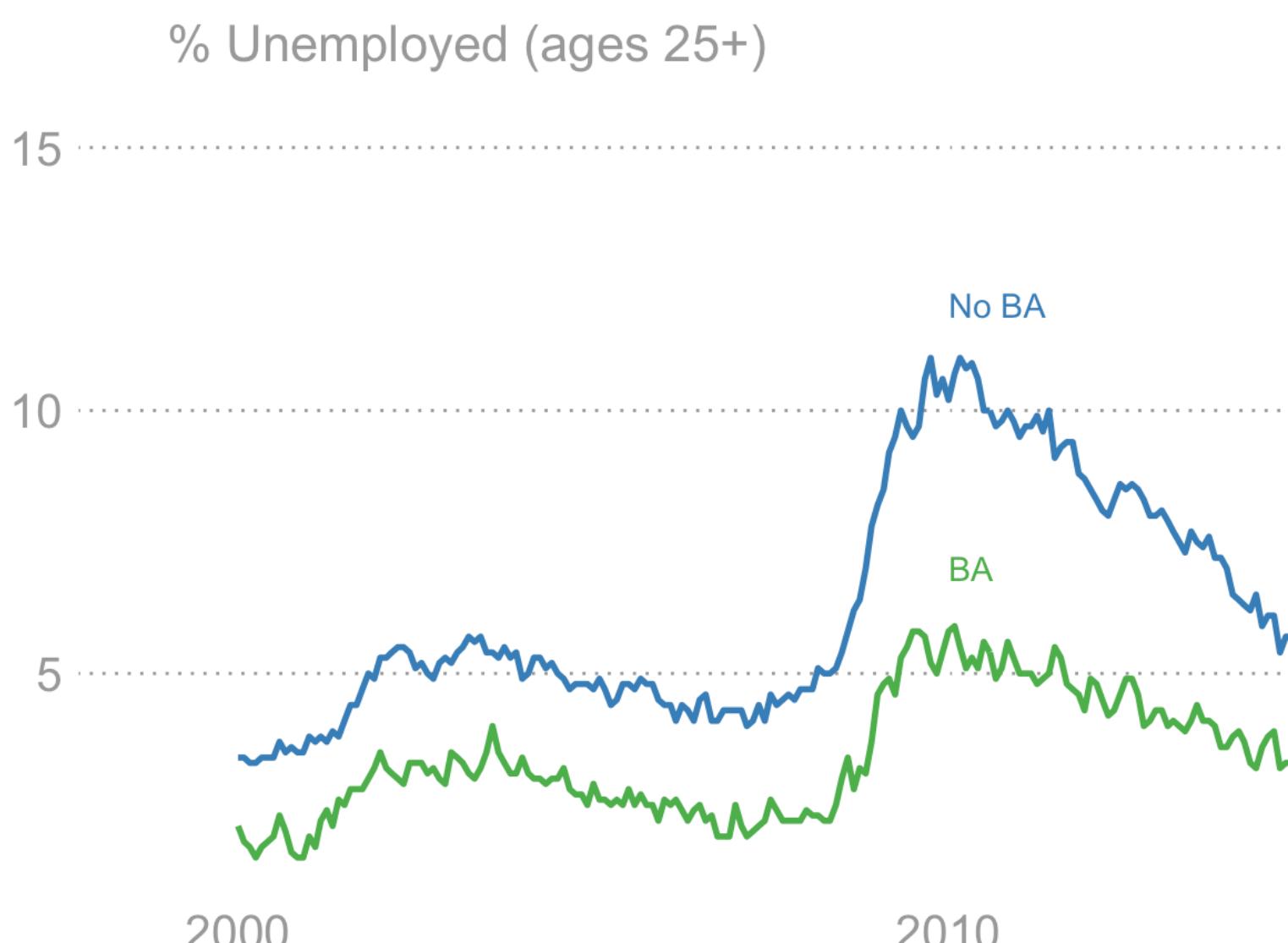


Source: Author’s calculations of NHIS.

What about disad

We propose a preliminary but plausible mechanism in which cumulative disadvantage from one birth cohort to the next—in the labor market, in marriage and child outcomes, and in the family—
is triggered by progressively worsening labor market opportunities at the time of entry for **whites with low levels of education**.

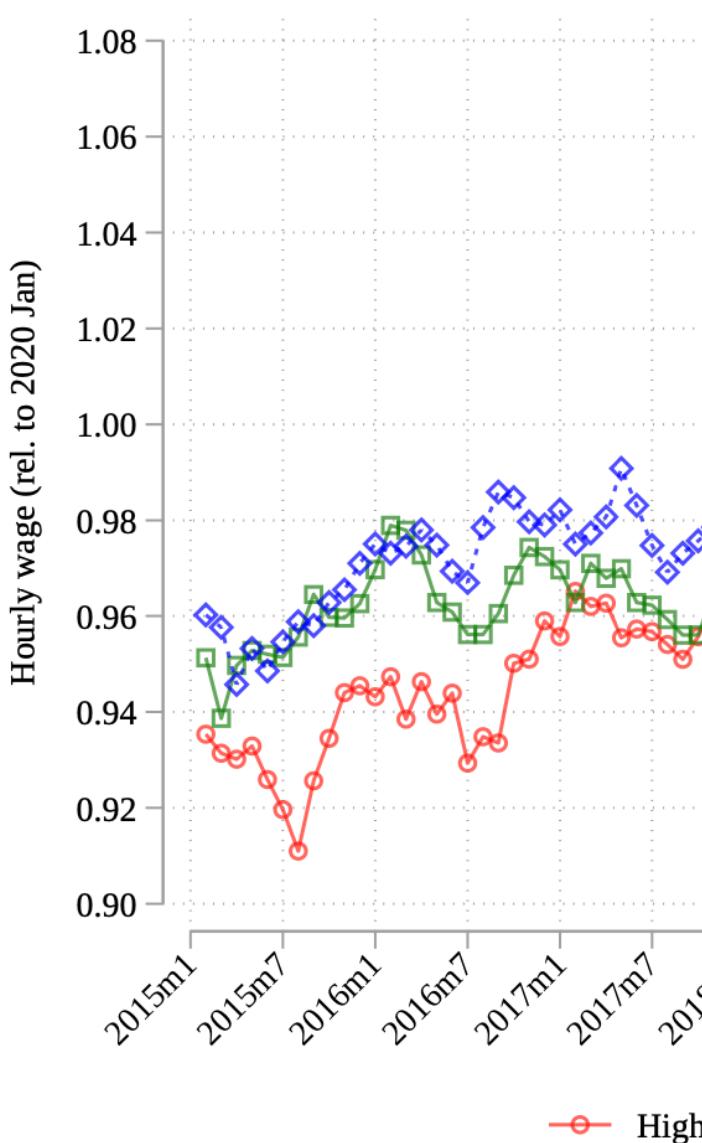
Unemployment gaps have remained large



Source: Federal Reserve Bank

The college wage premium

- Had risen since early 1980s.
- Rapid growth at bottom of wage distribution since 2012.
- Stronger for those under age 40.



Parting thoughts

- Economic life is demonstrably worse for those without a BA.
- Evidence linking the ‘tangle of pathology’ to limited.
- More recent work by CD reflects some of the critics.
- Excessive focus on narrative of ‘despair’ and disadvantage draws attention away from important causes, interventions, and policy groups.

Question
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