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**BBC**

**North-South health divide 'is widest for 40 years'**

By Sonya McGilchrist BBC News health reporter

The chances of dying early - below the age of 75 - are a fifth higher in the North of England compared with the South, research suggests.

A study published in the [British Medical Journal](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d508) said the north-south mortality difference was now at its widest for 40 years.

Researchers from the University of Manchester compared death rates from 1965 to 2008.

The government said health inequalities were being addressed.

In 1965, those living in the north were 16% more likely to die before the age of 75 than their southern counterparts. This had risen to just over 20% by 2008.

Men were more likely to be affected.

For men, the average geographical inequality rate over the period 1965 - 2008 was 15%, compared with 13% for women.

Lead researcher, Professor Ian Buchan, said that even when people in the North and the South were born into similar socio-economic groups, health inequalities persisted.

More resources

He said that this was because people in the South, even if they had low incomes, had greater access to resources: "There is an overall concentration of resource in the South, the 'built environment' is very different, there's more access to education, transport and other large scale resources."

Public health specialist Professor Sir Michael Marmot published an update to his in-depth review on health inequalities last week.

He said health inequalities are caused by social and economic reasons and that inequalities also existed within regions: "There is strong evidence that the underlying causes of the divide, the 'causes of the causes' are social and economic.

"For example, there is evidence that there are social gradients in health within every region; and that differences between neighbourhoods depend closely on their social and economic profiles.

"While these gradients exist within every region and local area, they are wider in the North."

Experts analysed trends for English government office regions, comparing the North with the South.

They looked at the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and West Midlands compared with the East of England, London, the South East and South West.

The researchers looked at the age of death across the whole population in each region they studied.

Overall, during that period, mortality in England has greatly reduced since 1965. It has reduced by about 50% for men and about 40% for women with both North and South experiencing similar reductions.

The gap between mortality rates in the North and South is now at its widest point, but it has fluctuated over the 43 years of the study.

**NHS action**

From the early 1980s to the late 1990s, the North-South divide decreased significantly for both sexes. This was followed by a rise from 2000 to 2008.

Professor Iain Buchan said it was unclear why rates had fluctuated over the whole period. The rise in the rates coincided with a boom period for the economy and significant investment in northern cities.

Professor Iain Buchan said that the differences were not due to behavioural differences: "These differences are not because those in the north are not looking after themselves... this is because of social, economic and health care resources controlled by government. For example, there are fewer GPs in deprived areas."

The Department of Health said it was committed to reducing health inequalities: "We are also providing a ring-fenced public health budget, weighted towards the most deprived areas, to ensure resources are spent on preventative work, with incentives to improve the health of the poorest, the fastest."

However public health expert, Professor Alan Maryon-Davis said government cuts would worsen health inequalities: "Health care also depends very much on social care and voluntary support in the community. I'm afraid that, with the huge cuts in local authority budgets in places like Liverpool, Manchester and other parts of the North, the divide is only likely to widen even further."

* [Denis Campbell](http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/deniscampbell) Health correspondent
* [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), Tuesday 15 February 2011 23.30 GMT

**GUARDIAN**

**Northerners '20% more likely to die under 75' than southerners**

North-south divide in life expectancy is widest for 40 years and likely to worsen because of recession, researchers say

Some 37,000 people a year die in the north earlier than they might if they had enjoyed the same life chances as those in the south.

People in the north of England are 20% more likely to die before they reach 75 than those in the south, research has revealed.

The north-south divide in longevity is the widest for 40 years and is likely to worsen because of the recession, according to a study in the British Medical Journal. Every year some 37,000 people die in the north earlier than they might if they had enjoyed the same life chances as those in the south. A plethora of government initiatives and tens of billions of pounds of public spending have failed to reduce the glaring health inequalities, which have existed since 1066, the co-authors say.

Researchers from Manchester University and Manchester city council looked at death rates in each of the nine government office regions of England every year from 1965 to 2008. Throughout that period the north had a fifth more premature deaths – defined as those under 75 – than the south. "Our findings point towards a severe, long-term and recently worsening structural health problem in the geography of England, which may not have received the attention it requires from government policy and which has been resistant to specific policies to reduce inequalities in health or to regenerate local communities," write the authors.

"Inequalities in all causes of mortality in the north-south divide were severe and persistent over the four decades from 1965 to 2008," they say.

The differential was more noticeable in men than women.

While the gap narrowed after the early 1980s, it rose steeply again between 2000 and 2008, and is now the widest it has been since 1965, the study found.

"There is strong evidence that the underlying causes of the divide, the 'causes of the causes', are social and economic", said Prof Sir Michael Marmot of University College London, the UK's leading expert on health inequalities.

The Department of Health said everyone should have the same chance to lead a healthy life regardless of where they lived. "This means tackling the wider, social causes of ill health and early death as well as addressing individual healthy lifestyles," said a spokeswoman.

**INDEPENDENT**

**North-South health divide 'kills thousands every year'**

[By Jeremy Laurance](http://www.independent.co.uk/search/simple.do?destinationSectionUniqueName=search&publicationName=ind&pageLength=5&startDay=1&startMonth=1&startYear=2010&useSectionFilter=true&useHideArticle=true&searchString=byline_text:%28%22By%20Jeremy%20Laurance%22%29&displaySearchString=By%20Jeremy%20Laurance) , [Health Editor](http://www.independent.co.uk/search/simple.do?destinationSectionUniqueName=search&publicationName=ind&pageLength=5&startDay=1&startMonth=1&startYear=2010&useSectionFilter=true&useHideArticle=true&searchString=byline_text:%28%22%20Health%20Editor%22%29&displaySearchString=%20Health%20Editor)

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The health divide between the North and South of the country is at its widest for 40 years and is claiming the lives of tens of thousands of people before their time, a study has found.

Every year 37,000 people – enough to fill a football stadium – die in the North earlier than their counterparts in the South. But all efforts to narrow the gap have failed. Premature deaths before the age of 75 are a fifth higher in the North, and the gap has changed little since the 1960s. It even widened between 2000 and 2008 despite government expenditure of £20bn on initiatives supposed to close it.

The divide has persisted despite large improvements in health in all regions of the country over the past 40 years. Death rates have fallen by 50 per cent in men and 40 per cent in women since 1965, with both the North and South seeing similar reductions. But the North has never caught up with the South and, in the last decade, seems to be slipping further behind.

Researchers warned yesterday that the excess toll of ill health and disability in the North was "decimating [the region] at the rate of one major city every decade". It is certain to get worse as the effects of the recession are felt disproportionately in the North.

Iain Buchan, professor of public health informatics at the University of Manchester, who led the study, which was published online in the British Medical Journal, said that genetic, climatic and environmental differences could "in no way" account for the gap.

Rather than pinning the blame on differences in lifestyle such as smoking and drinking, the key factor behind the gap was money, he said. "The counter-intuitive fact is that the behavioural differences we can measure account for just one fifth of the gap. The difference in smoking, for example, accounts for only 14 per cent [of the northern excess deaths]. But there is a large body of evidence that shows that the amount of disposable income has a much greater effect.

"Social and economic factors are extremely reliable predictors of health. If you put more resources into an area, or take them out, its health will improve or decline. It would be unheard of for economic growth not to translate into better health."

The health divide mirrors the income disparity between North and South, the researchers say. The "gross value added per head" – a measure of the state of the local economy – was 40 per cent higher in the South than the North in 2008, having risen from 25 per cent in 1989.

The cash people had to spend – their "disposable income" – was more than 26 per cent higher in the South, up from 21 per cent in 1995, even after allowing for the higher cost of living. Professor Buchan said the North-South divide had persisted since 1066 and reflected a London-centric nation with power and money concentrated in the South for the last 1,000 years. Benjamin Disraeli wrote that England was a tale of two countries and William Farr, the 19th-century epidemiologist and founder of medical statistics, blamed the divide on the habit of healthier people in the North migrating to better-off areas in the South, leaving their sickly peers behind.

Migration may still be a factor maintaining the divide but is unlikely to be a major one, the researchers say. Spending on the NHS is inadequate in the North, relative to the high health needs. The Commons Public Accounts Committee accused the Government of failing to address the shortage of GPs in the North in its report on health inequalities last October. Two-thirds of the areas with the highest deprivation were failing to get the money they were due for dealing with excess ill health, it said.

Professor Buchan said the failure of the huge injection of funds by the previous Labour government to close the health gap demonstrated the difficulty of overcoming the social and economic forces driving North and South apart.

"We have to target business development in the North – the South is overworked. The challenge is to have an investment strategy to make the country less London-centric. If we want better health in the North it has to go hand in hand with social and economic change."

**The North-South divide in numbers**

**House prices**

The value of homes in the South rose last year, led by a 6.3 per cent increase in London. Average prices dipped in the North, with the North-east experiencing a 3.3 per cent fall, according to the Land Registry.

**Income**

In 2008, average disposable household income was £19,038 in London and £16,792 in the South-east, according to the Office for National Statistics. This was against £12,543 in the North-east. London households earned more than 28 per cent over the national average in 2008.

**Unemployment**

In the 12 months ending June 2010, the highest unemployment rate in Britain was in Kingston-upon-Hull, East Yorkshire, at 14 .1 per cent, followed by Blaenau Gwent in Wales at 13.8 per cent. The region with the narrowest spread of unemployment rates was the South-west, where the highest rate of unemployment was found in Torbay, at 8.8 per cent.

**Shops lying vacant**

The Local Data Company described a "large and growing" divide. In 2010, 90 per cent of the top 25 large towns with the highest vacancies were in the Midlands or North, with 28 per cent of stores in Rotherham vacant. Big shopping centres in London and the South-east were said to be "holding up well".

**MIRROR**

**North-South divide's life expectancy gap now at a 40-year-high**

AROUND 37,000 more people a year go to their graves early in the North compared with the South, a grim health report reveals today.

The death toll in the fatal North-South health divide is the equivalent of a typical crowd at a Premier League football stadium.

Those living in places such as Yorkshire, Lancashire and Tyne & Wear are 20% more likely to die before their time.

Every age group in the North is affected by a higher chance of a premature death.

And the difference in the numbers dying under 75 is at a 40-year high.

The report warns: “The North is being decimated at the rate of a major city every decade.”

The research, by the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council’s joint health unit, says the inequality will worsen as Government cuts ravage jobs in the North.

Professor Iain Buchan, of the university’s School of Community Based Medicine, said: “If you imagine a football stadium full of people who have died early but would not have done had they lived in the South, it is a very sobering view.”

The impact of the recession was “potentially disastrous” for the North, hit hardest by job losses as the Tory-led Coalition targets the public sector for savage cuts.

The South enjoys 25% more disposable income than the North, which is up from 20% 15 years ago.

The geographic divide runs roughly from The Wash in Norfolk to Bristol in the South West – and Prof Buchan said the differences were mainly due to wealth. He warned: “Dealing with this is not something that can be delayed. Focusing social and economic recovery on the North is the only way to tackle this death rate divide.

“It is a misconception to focus on lifestyle issues like eating, drinking and smoking. Those factors account for only a fifth of the problem. It is principally about money and resources, which give people more control over their lives and enable them to make healthier choices.”

The study, published in the British Medical Journal, says the biggest rise has been in the 20 to 34 age group, which has leapt to a 22% difference between North and South from level rates in 1965.

The study collated data from 1965 to 2008 which showed a persistent life expectancy gap of 14% over four decades, with men suffering more at 15% compared with women at 13%.

But the key figure was the current 20% gap in overall deaths under 75.

Prof Buchan said the nation was heading for even deeper health inequality and economic chaos if the divide was not closed.

He added: “In the most deprived areas, there are the fewest number of GPs per head of population. There are fewer GPs in the North where there is a greater need.”

A Department of Health spokeswoman said: “Everyone should have the same opportunity to lead a healthy life, no matter where they live. The Government has made it clear that reducing health inequalities is a priority as part of its commitment to fairness and social justice.”

\* A TORY doctor MP was banned by the party from opposing David Cameron’s NHS reforms.

GP Sarah Wollaston wanted to put forward a number of changes to committee ­scrutinising the ­legislation but Tory whips stopped her.

Dr Wollaston, MP for Totnes, Devon, said: “Clearly I’m not going to participate if I’m told not to say anything against party line.”

By [Stephen Adams](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/stephen-adams/), Medical Correspondent

6:30AM GMT 16 Feb 2011

**TELEGRAPH**

**North-south health divide 'at widest point in 40 years'**

**England's north-south health divide is at its widest in 40 years, according to a study published today.**

People in the north are 20 per cent more likely to die before the age of 75 than those in the south, found researchers at Manchester University and Manchester council.

The health gap narrowed from the early 80s to the early 90s, they discovered, but increased "steeply" from 2000 to 2008 "despite the public policy emphasis in England over this period on reducing inequalities in health".

[Writing](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d508) in the *British Medical Journal*, they concluded: "This contrast indicates that the initiatives to reduce inequalities in health were insufficient to overcome the social, economic, and migration forces driving poorer health in the north than in the south."

[In an accompanying editorial](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d584), Margaret Whitehead, professor of public health at Liverpool University, wrote: "Since 1965, the toll of excess deaths has surpassed 1.5 million— the north is being decimated at the rate of a major city every decade."

Despite New Labour's efforts, she said: "The health divide continued to grow, however, and for people under 75 it is now at its widest for 40 years.

"Having reached this nadir in the relatively favourable economic and political climate of the 2000s, future prospects look grim."

However, it is only the relative health divide that has increased.

Life expectancy has increased in all parts of the country since 1965, but it has increased faster in the south than in the north.