

# Thatcher's policies condemned for causing 'unjust premature death'

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Dr Alex Scott-Samuel and colleagues from the Universities of Durham, West of Scotland, Glasgow and Edinburgh, sourced data from over 70 existing research papers, which concludes that as a result of unnecessary unemployment, welfare cuts and damaging housing policies, the former prime minister's legacy "includes the unnecessary and unjust premature death of many British citizens, together with a substantial and continuing burden of suffering and loss of well-being."

Speaking about the figures, Dr Scott-Samuel said: "Towards the end of the 1980s we were seeing around 500 excess deaths each year from [chronic liver disease](#) and cirrhosis. We also know that there were 2,500 excess deaths per year as a result of unemployment caused by Thatcher's policies. And these [premature deaths](#) represent just the tip of an immense iceberg of sickness and suffering resulting from Thatcherism."

The article also cites evidence including the increase in [income inequality](#) under Thatcher - the richest 0.01% of society had 28 times the mean national average income in 1978 but 70 times the average in 1990, and the rise in UK poverty rates from 6.7% in 1975 to 12% in 1985.

It argues that "Thatcher's governments wilfully engineered an economic catastrophe across large parts of Britain" by dismantling traditional industries such as coal and steel in order to undermine the power of working class organisations, such as unions.

This ultimately fed through into growing regional disparities in health

standards and life expectancy, as well as greatly increased inequalities between the richest and poorest in society.

The researchers use figures from bodies such as the Office for National Statistics and the World Health Organisation, which show high levels of alcohol and drug-related mortality and a rise in deaths from violence and suicide, as evidence of health problems caused by rising inequality during the Thatcher years.

Whilst the NHS was relatively untouched by Thatcher's policies, the authors point to policy changes in healthcare such as outsourcing hospital cleaners, which removed "a friendly, reassuring presence" from hospital wards, led to increases in hospital acquired infections, and laid the ground for further privatisation under the future Labour and Coalition governments.

Dr Scott-Samuel said: "The policies of successive Thatcher governments are at the heart of the attacks on the NHS, the welfare state and local authority services by the coalition government. It is clear that Thatcher's wholesale changes to the British economy created massive regional and social inequalities which are continuing to have a direct impact on people's health at the present time."

The paper has been published in the *International Journal of Health Services*.

Provided by University of Liverpool

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