

Is relative poverty or lack of healthcare funding responsible for excess deaths of British children?

April 21 2015

New research from Bournemouth University has found that the UK has the fourth highest child mortality rate, third worst relative poverty and lowest funded health care in the Western world.

Through [data analysis](#), the research team was able to compare the UK to other Western countries to draw [conclusions](#) about the number of [child deaths](#) in the UK.

The study did present some [good news](#), as British Child-Mortality-Rates (CMR) have fallen 42% over past 20 years. However, the average fall of the other 20 Western countries measured is 50%, suggesting the UK's child mortality rate is dropping at a slower rate compared to its Western contemporaries.

The extent of this difference was further evidenced when comparing Britain with Portugal, which used to have the highest child mortality but is now considerably lower. Professor Colin Pritchard of Bournemouth University, who led the research, explained, "If we had the Portuguese rate there would be 1,827 fewer deaths in children aged 0-14 in the UK per year. This is a startling statistic and shows that we need to pay attention to what is happening here in the UK.

"We also examined child mortality rates in the context of relative poverty, measured by income inequality, which is the gap between the

top and bottom 20% of incomes. Whilst the USA tops the league, the UK had the third worst relative poverty and poverty has long been linked to worst health outcomes."

Another measure used in the study was the proportion of GDP (gross domestic product) that each country spends on health. Between 1980 and 2008 the UK averaged joint lowest, thus other countries, including countries such as Greece and Portugal spend more of their GDP on health than Britain.

Professor Pritchard continued, "While the relative amount of money spent on health care in each country may partly explain the results, we cannot blame the NHS as earlier research on reducing adult deaths (55-74 years old) showed Britain had the fourth biggest reduction in adult deaths amongst Western countries.

"So the question is, if we are doing well in reducing adult mortality, are British children disadvantaged because of relative poverty and proportionately low funded health care?

"The answer appears to be yes and there is worrying evidence that UK income inequalities are widening.

"We can't blame the NHS, as it achieves more with relatively less but more needs to be done in the area of relative poverty and [health care](#) funding before Britain will be able to match the successes of the majority of other Western countries. Now is the time to invest properly in our healthcare system if we want to see [child mortality](#) rates in the UK drop further," concludes Professor Pritchard.

More information: "Comparing UK and Other Western Health Expenditure, Relative Poverty and Child Mortality: Are British Children Doubly Disadvantaged?" *Children & Society* [DOI: 10.1111/chso.12079](https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12079)

Provided by Bournemouth University

Citation: Is relative poverty or lack of healthcare funding responsible for excess deaths of British children? (2015, April 21) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-relative-poverty-lack-healthcare-funding.html>

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