

Deaths due to medical errors increased after the financial crash in Greece

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Credit: City University London

Deaths due to medical errors increased significantly after the onset of the crisis in Greece, according to new analysis from researchers at City, University of London, Surrey University and Stanford University.

The study also found that the crisis in Greece resulted in an extra 242 deaths per month, with deaths from diseases of the nervous system such as Alzheimer's also increasing.

The findings, which are published in *The Lancet Public Health*, highlight the effects of a deterioration in the quality of care during economic recessions and the authors suggest they could be explained by serious shortages of medical staff and burnout among [health](#) workers.

Greece was one of the countries hit the hardest by the 2008 [financial crisis](#) in Europe, and the collapse had a direct effect on the Greek health system, which faced financial difficulties and structural problems long before the crisis hit. Many health reforms had been on the agenda for over a decade, but had never been implemented because of an absence of political will and the resistance of key stakeholders. However, when these reforms were finally enacted, the Greek economy was already deteriorating severely. The implementation of public cuts resulted in a 25% reduction in health expenditures between 2008 and 2012.

To investigate the effect of the crisis on the Greek population's health and how it affected the trend of overall and cause-specific mortality rates, the researchers used regional panel data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority to assess mortality trends by age, sex, region, and cause from between January 2001 and December 2013. They also used Eurostat data to calculate monthly age-standardised [mortality rates](#) per 100,000 inhabitants for each region.

Data was then divided into two periods: before the crisis (January 2001 to August 2008) and after the onset of the crisis (September 2008 to December 2013) and in particular they looked from changes in mortality by using a statistical method called interrupted time-series analysis.

The results showed that overall mortality continued to decline after the onset of the financial crisis but at a slower pace. The trend difference was more evident for females than for males. Deaths from suicides, diseases of the nervous system, and [mental health problems](#) increased after the onset of the crisis.

Also, deaths due to medical errors increased significantly after the onset of the crisis. By comparing the expected values of the period after the onset of the crisis with extrapolated values based on the period before the crisis, the researchers also estimate that an extra 242 deaths per

month occurred after the onset of the crisis.

Dr Charitini Stavropoulou, a health economist at City, University of London and one of the authors of the paper, said:

"The financial crisis has had a huge impact on Greece, and in particular the health sector. From 2008 onwards there has been a 25% reduction in health expenditure, which has compromised the quality of health services provided. This could possibly explain one of the main findings of our study that the number of deaths due [medical errors](#) has increased significantly after the onset of the crisis.

"Although hard to quantify, the impact of the financial crisis was seen in the extra 242 deaths per month occurred after the onset of the crisis. Changes in common causes of [death](#) such as circulatory diseases are likely to be more important contributors to the number of excess deaths during the recession than suicides, which have captured the attention of the media till now. This is a significant increase in the number of deaths, and shows the impact such crises can have on people and their health."

Provided by City University London

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