

UK life expectancy growth lags behind all other G7 states besides US

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29 March 2023

According to an analysis of global life expectancy rankings published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, the UK lags behind all the other G7 advanced economies except the US. Life expectancy in the UK has grown at a slower rate than comparable countries over the past seven decades. The researchers conclude that this is due to widening social inequality.

Life expectancy rankings of the G7 countries are shown for each decade from 1950 to 2020. The G7—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and the US—represent approximately half of global economic output. In 2021, the UK was ranked 29th in the world, compared to seventh in the 1950s.

The longitudinal research ends at the point when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, causing global life expectancy to decline globally for the first time since World War II in 2020 and 2021. Life expectancy in Britain today is at its lowest in 10 years.

Evidence indicates the growth in life expectancy began slowing 10 years before the pandemic in 2010-11. Analysts at the time linked the phenomenon to the “age of austerity” beginning in 2008, including savage cuts to welfare benefits, the National Health Service and local government services. These most recent falls in UK life expectancy are the sharpest recorded outside those experienced in wartime.

The new research was conducted by academics from the University of Oxford and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine who examined global life expectancy ratings between 1952 and 2020.

Life expectancy in Britain has increased in absolute terms, but similar countries have experienced larger increases. The researchers said this is partially due to income inequality, which rose considerably during and after the 1980s. Prof Martin McKee, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine said, “That

rise also saw an increase in the variation in life expectancy between different social groups. One reason why the overall increase in life expectancy has been so sluggish in the UK is that in recent years it has fallen for poorer groups”.

The research found varying increases in life expectancy between social classes, with workers on low incomes typically not living as long as higher earners.

Life expectancy for the most deprived sections of the working class is actually falling, not rising. The scissors-like dynamic with expected years of life rising for the richest in society and falling for the poorest is a direct expression of spiraling inequality, whereby wealth and income is gathered in ever more grotesque amounts among the super-rich while most workers struggle to get by on less each year.

“Perhaps we should not be surprised to see that inequality reflected in such wide health inequalities and a declining overall position,” said Dr. Lucinda Hiam, of the University of Oxford. Hiam added that the government also has an “acute crisis to address”, referring to deaths caused by long A&E waits and delayed appointments.

“A relative worsening of population health... has historically been seen as an early sign of severe political and economic problems,” said Dr. Hiam. “This new analysis suggests that the problems the UK faces are deep seated and raises serious questions about the path that this country is following.”

Such warnings fall on deaf ears. The ruling class has orchestrated a decades long social counterrevolution which is only accelerating.

While 1977 is commonly accepted as the least socially unequal year on record in the UK it was also the year the Labour government cut benefits and public services as conditions of an emergency loan from the

International Monetary Fund which amounted to a Structural Adjustment Program.

Labour's attacks were a prelude to the 1979 Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, which waged all-out war on the working class and sent rates of unemployment and poverty skyrocketing, while the affluent middle class and the super-rich made a killing.

Social inequality rocketed in the late 1970s and 1980, with the richest 1 percent in particular climbing far above the rest of society in the decades since. The Blair/Brown Labour government embraced Thatcherism, with Thatcher herself saying that their New Labour was her greatest achievement.

The researchers emphasize the impact of the 2010s—in the aftermath of the financial crisis and during which savage austerity policies and cuts were implemented—which have brought about a situation whereby “the average UK household having lower incomes in 2012 than in France or Germany, paving the way for a decade in which health and the economy stagnate”.

Now a new age of austerity has been declared under the slogan “the end of the peace dividend”, as the costs of pandemic corporate bailouts, rampant inflation and the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine are clawed out of workers' wages, working conditions and public services.

Another researcher who contributed to the findings, Oxford University human geographer Danny Dorling, described the relative decline of life expectancy in the UK as “stark” and said it reflected recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) findings that the UK is now the second most economically unequal country in Europe after Bulgaria.

The findings by the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* echo other recent studies throwing light on how growing social inequality and entrenched poverty in the UK are destroying the health of the working class. One showed that Britain is now falling behind most comparable European countries on maternal mortality, which is commonly considered a canary in the coalmine for wider negative health implications.

Both falling life expectancy and worsening maternal mortality have been exacerbated recently by the pandemic.

Noting the soaring rates of maternal mortality among working class mothers in the US, the *World Socialist*

Web Site recently concluded, “The soaring rate of maternal mortality is a political alarm bell for the working class. The crisis of capitalism threatens the most dire consequences for humanity, even in this most basic of social functions, reproduction. Only the working class will fight for a policy that is vitally necessary to ensure safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth, and social support for mother, child and the entire family afterward.”



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