

Health Inequalities in Wirral

Factsheet 1: Life expectancy at birth in Wirral

Introduction

Life expectancy at birth in England showed dramatic increases throughout the twentieth century as health and living conditions improved, increasing from 46 for men and 50 for women in 1900, to 77.5 for men and 81.7 for women in 2006-08 ^[1].

However, increases in life expectancy have not been uniform across all social groups. For those in the more affluent social groups, life expectancy has shown a marked increase, whilst for those in more deprived groups, progress has been significantly slower ^[1].

In recent years (since the 1970's), the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived in society has actually increased. Consequently, increasing life expectancy whilst also narrowing the gap between those with the lowest life expectancy and the rest of the population is now a key public health target nationally ^[1].

This report summarises the most recently available data for life expectancy in Wirral and our progress against the nationally set targets.

What does life expectancy at birth measure?

Life expectancy is, "an estimate of the average number of years a person...would survive if he or she experienced the particular area's age-specific mortality rates for that time period throughout the rest of his or her life" ^[2].

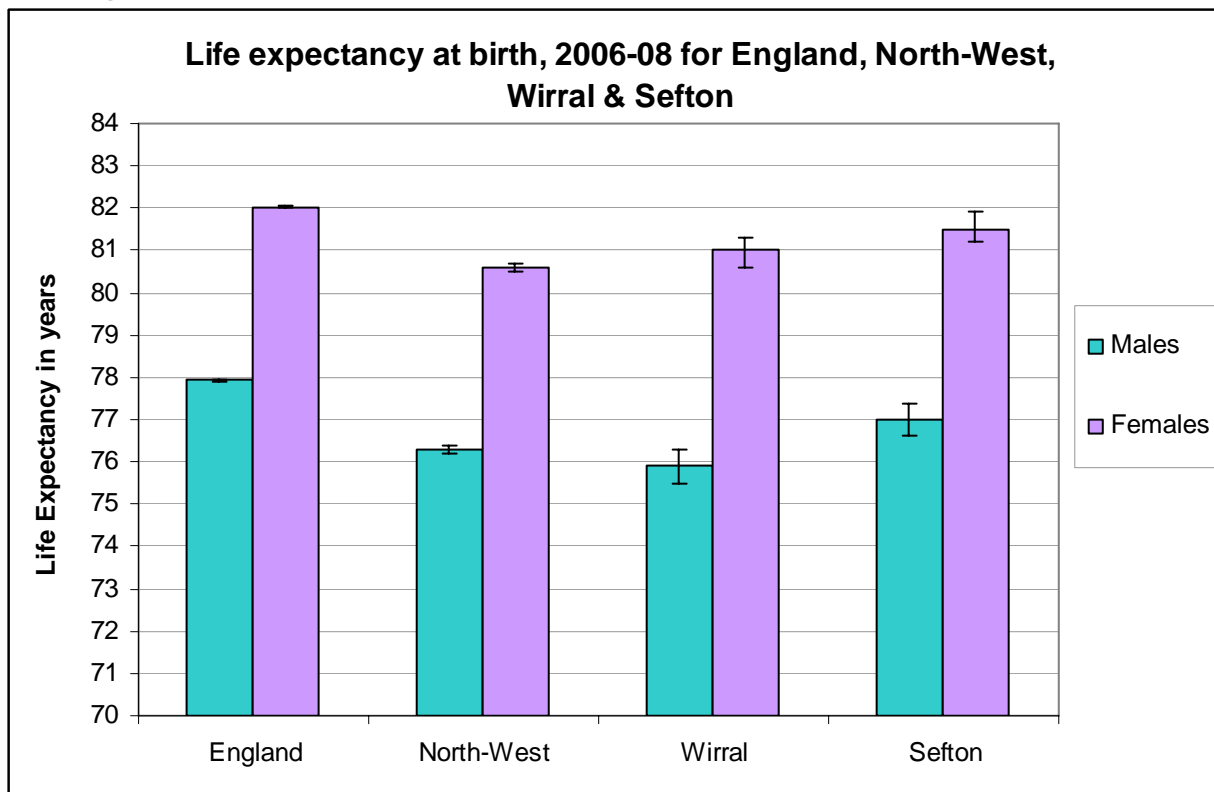
It is not the number of years a baby could *actually* expect to live, because it makes no allowance for probable future changes in death rates (i.e people living longer) and because many people move away from the area in which they were born.

Life expectancy is a measure calculated using age-specific mortality rates which reflects overall population mortality. In other words, when we assess the life expectancy for an area, we are really assessing the mortality of that area in a standardised way that can be monitored and compared over time. Life tables are used to calculate life expectancy at birth using the Chiang methodology <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

Current data

In 2006-08, life expectancy in Wirral was 75.9 for men and 80.1 for women, compared to 77.9 years for men and 82.0 years for women in England (see Figure 1 below). Wirral's statistical, 'near neighbour' Sefton is also shown.

Figure 1: Life Expectancy at Birth (95% Confidence Intervals), Wirral, Sefton, North West and England, men and women, 2006-08



Source: ONS, (www.statistics.gov.uk)

Targets

1. National Life Expectancy Target (PSA or Public Service Agreement Target)

By 2010, to achieve a 10% reduction in the relative gap (i.e percentage difference) in life expectancy at birth between the fifth of areas with the worst health and deprivation indicators (the Spearhead Group) and England as a whole.

For Wirral this equates to the following target:

- By 2010, to reduce the relative gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England as a whole from 1.95% to 1.76% for men and from 0.88% to 0.79% for women.

Current progress

- Data for 2006-08 shows that Wirral is not meeting the national PSA target (Table 1).
- For women the gap in life expectancy has increased from 0.7 years to 1.0 years;
- For men, the gap in life expectancy has increased from 1.5 years to 2 years;
- It is important to note that the initial gap was relatively small, so even minor increases in life expectancy impact greatly on the gap.

Table 1: Progress towards the PSA life expectancy at birth target in Wirral

		Baseline 1995-97	1996- 98	1997- 99	1998- 00	1999- 01	2000- 02	2001- 03	2002- 04	2003- 05	2004- 06	2005- 07	2006- 08	Target 2010	% change 1995-97 to 2006-08
England	M	74.61	74.84	75.09	75.38	75.71	76.01	76.24	76.55	76.9	77.32	77.65	77.93		
	F	79.69	79.84	79.97	80.19	80.42	80.66	80.72	80.91	81.14	81.55	81.81	82.02		
Wirral	M	73.1	73.5	73.8	73.9	74.3	74.9	75.2	75.4	75.5	75.7	75.7	75.9		
	F	79	78.8	79	79.2	79.7	79.9	80	80.2	80.2	80.8	80.9	81		
Absolute gap	M	1.51	1.34	1.29	1.48	1.41	1.1	1.03	1.13	1.4	1.62	1.95	2.03	1.35	
	F	0.69	1.04	0.97	0.99	0.72	0.76	0.72	0.71	0.94	0.75	0.91	1.02	0.62	
Relative gap (%)	M	..	-17%	-22%	+19%	-10%	-41%	-48%	-38%	-11%	+11%	+44%	+52	-10%	+52%
	F	..	+35%	+28%	+30%	+3%	+7%	+3%	+2%	+25%	+6%	+22%	+33	-10%	+33%

Key points

- Life expectancy is increasing in Wirral. It is not however, improving at the same rate as England.
- The latest data (2006-08) shows a gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England of 2 years for males and 1 year for females
- This is an increase from the baseline years of 1995-97 when the gap was 1.46 years for men and 0.72 years for females.
- **According to this latest data, along with many of the other Spearhead areas, Wirral is not on track to meet the PSA life expectancy target**

Related topics and reports:

Health Equity Audits (various):

<http://info.wirral.nhs.uk/publications/healthequityaudits>

Evidence review on Wider determinants of health:

<http://info.wirral.nhs.uk/publications/evidencereviews/>

¹ Gregory I,N. Comparisons between geographies of mortality and deprivation from the 1900's and 2001: spatial analysis of census and mortality statistics. *BMJ* 2009; 339:b3454

² Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom, 2006-08. ONS Statistical Bulletin. 21 October 2009. Accessed via

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=8841> on 15/11/09