

Letter

Inequalities and Christmas Yet to Come

Editor—On 10 November National Statistics released new life expectancy figures by area and announced that "Inequalities in life expectancy persist across the UK."

"Persist" was an odd word to use. In Kensington and Chelsea, where it was already highest, it rose by exactly one year for both men and women (from 79.8 to 80.8 years and 84.8 to 85.8 years, respectively). In contrast, in Glasgow where it was lowest a year ago, life expectancy remained static at 76.4 years for women, and rose just slightly for men from 69.1 to 69.3 years. The range in life expectancy between the extreme highest and lowest areas thus increased from 8.4 to 9.4 years for women, and from 10.7 years to 11.5 years for men.

For men and women combined, the life expectancy gap between the worst and best off districts of the UK now exceeds 10 years for the first time since reliable measurements began. Of course more sophisticated measures are needed than this simple range, and the population denominators are problematic, especially in Kensington and Chelsea,² but the overall gap exceeding 10 years, and the first achievement of an average life expectancy over 85 years in women in one area whereas men's average expectancy remains below 70 years in another—should not pass without comment.

Five years ago we wrote, in relation to historic trends in inequalities, and in reference to Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, that "The hypothesis of the spirit of Christmas yet to come seems to be true—inequalities in health have not declined, partly because miserliness in the past does lead to future inequalities in health."³ Christmas Yet to Come, it seems, is upon us.

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