

Dorling, D. (2018) Public Inquiry into rising mortality in England announced, Public Sector Focus, July/August, pp.14-15, <http://flickread.com/edition/html/index.php?pdf=5b86bd48a793b#17>

# Public Inquiry into rising mortality in England announced

Danny Dorling



In June 2018 The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data for England that showed mortality rates to be rising across the country. This rise in mortality rates had occurred even after having taken out the likely impact of population ageing. In other words, more people were dying and that was not because of a greater proportion of people becoming older.

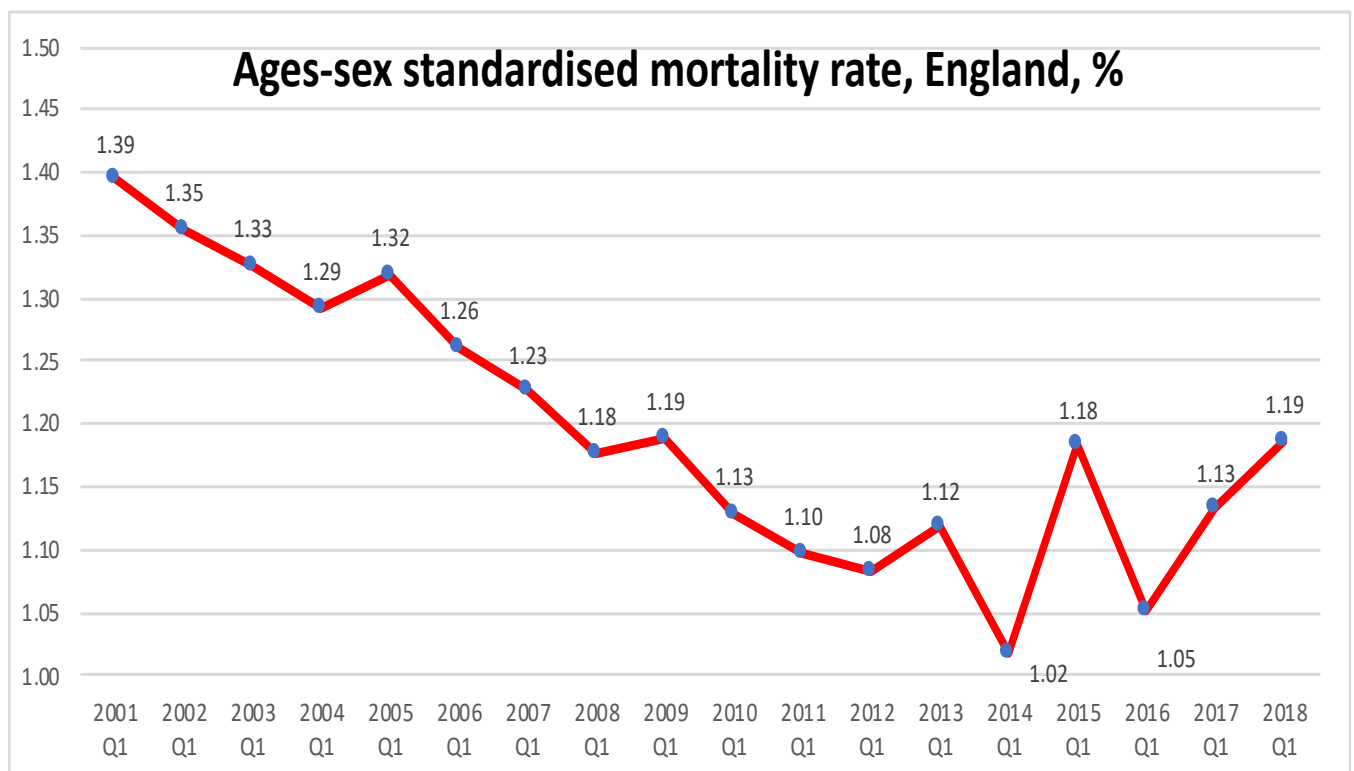
On August 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 the BBC reported this news under the headline “Why did more people die in depths of last winter?” and also announced that the department of health were still to announce the terms of reference of an official enquiry into the deaths although it is *‘understood they will cover areas like excess winter deaths and deprivation.’*<sup>1</sup> This was not very reassuring given

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45024103>

the much longer list of possible causes that had been published almost two months earlier in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.<sup>2</sup>

The rise marked the end of a longer period of improvement that had lasted from long before the Second World War through to around 2012. As the figure taken from the ONS report below shows, there had been the occasional very small rise, before as occurred in 2005 and 2009 .



*Note: shows proportion of people dying each year in England at quarter 1 rates.*

*Source of graph:*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/article/s/quarterlymortalityreports/januarytomarch2018>

<sup>2</sup> The cuts and poor health: when and how can we say that one thing causes another?  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0141076818779237>

According to the Met Office the winter of Quarter 1 2009 was the coldest since 1995/6 in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> Partly as a result of the unusual cold there was a slight rise in age-sex standardized mortality between Q1 2008 and Q1 2009. Similarly, in Q1 2005 there was a great deal of snow at times. More recent winters have been much warmer. There has been no unusually cold winter since at least 2011. The cold does not account for what has happened recently.

The recent rises in mortality rate was also not due to influenza. As the ONS commented in June 2018: *'influenza activity remained at medium levels throughout the whole of January and February 2018.'*<sup>4</sup> No influenza epidemics have been recorded in any recent year the rapid rise in mortality in England is not due to influenza.

The diagram below shows what the pattern of an influenza epidemic looks like in terms of severity and duration based on the epidemics that did take place in England in the winters of 1969/70, 1989/90, 1993/94 and 1999/2000. If we were to suffer an influenza epidemic this is the most likely pattern in terms of severity rising rapidly over the course of less than five weeks and then falling equally rapidly again. An influenza epidemic on top of what has already happened would be devastating.

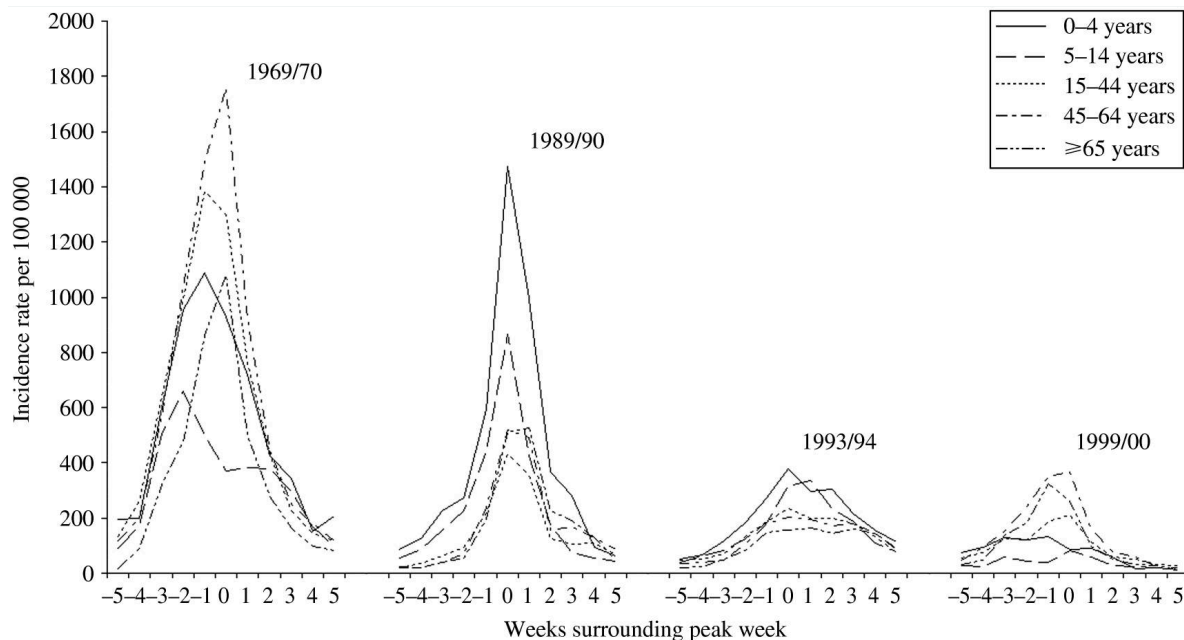
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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/summaries/2009/winter>

<sup>4</sup>

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**The weekly incidence of Influenza-like illness (ILI) described by age for a selection of the more severe epidemics over the last 40 years. Age-specific rates are presented for the weeks surrounding the peak week of all-age incidence (week 0)**



Source: Fleming, D.M. and Elliot, A.J. (2008) 'Lessons from 40 years' surveillance of influenza in England and Wales. *Epidemiology and Infection*, 136, 866-875, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2870877/#>

ONS published analysis in June 2018 that concluded that the change in the mortality trend could be shown to have occurred between 2011 and 2012 for the age groups that were most effected.<sup>5</sup> So we now know when whatever has happened began to happen.

Data is available on the number of deaths that occurred in each area of Britain in Quarter 1 2018 and Quarter 1 2016.<sup>6</sup> This is the period show in the graph

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/changingtrends inmortalityinenglandandwalesexperimentalstatisticsupportingdata>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/monthlyfiguresondeathsregisteredbyareaofusualresidence>

above in which the greatest rise in age-sex adjusted mortality rates occurred most recently. There will also have been changes to the age structure of the population in these areas, but these are likely to be slight. The table below shows the 22 local authority districts in which at least 100 additional people died in the same quarter of 2018 as compared to 2016, and in which there was also at least a 25% rise in mortality rates.

### The areas of England which experienced the greatest increases in mortality Q1 2016 to Q1 2018

Increase in deaths	Deaths in three months		% risen	District
	Q1 2018	Q1 2016		
129	411	282	46%	South Staffordshire
125	419	294	43%	West Lancashire
123	418	295	42%	Preston
143	510	367	39%	Huntingdonshire
182	655	473	38%	Hillingdon
111	402	291	38%	North Kesteven
134	508	374	36%	Suffolk Coastal
117	454	337	35%	Stafford
100	390	290	34%	Gedling
110	431	321	34%	Wycombe
171	687	516	33%	Central Bedfordshire
205	883	678	30%	Stoke-on-Trent
106	460	354	30%	Eastbourne
126	564	438	29%	South Tyneside
109	489	380	29%	Waveney
123	557	434	28%	Wealden
115	546	431	27%	Harrogate
135	642	507	27%	Bexley
100	476	376	27%	Chichester
182	873	691	26%	Wolverhampton
116	558	442	26%	Northampton
104	512	408	25%	Redcar and Cleveland

**Source:**

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/monthlyfiguresondeathsregisteredbyareaofusualresidence>

## The Regions England increases in mortality Q1 2016 to Q1 2018

Increase in deaths	Deaths in three months		% rise	Region/County
	Q1 2018	Q1 2016		
726	4030	3304	22%	Lancashire
2259	13992	11733	19%	EAST MIDLANDS
2738	17399	14661	19%	WEST MIDLANDS
2788	17825	15037	19%	EAST
3519	25105	21586	16%	SOUTH EAST
<b>20907</b>	<b>153635</b>	<b>132728</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>ENGLAND</b>
1395	10502	9107	15%	WALES
2839	21987	19148	15%	NORTH WEST
1100	8662	7562	15%	NORTH EAST
				YORKSHIRE AND THE
2012	16066	14054	14%	HUMBER
2113	17651	15538	14%	SOUTH WEST
732	6289	5557	13%	West Yorkshire (Met County)
				Greater Manchester (Met
859	7411	6552	13%	County)
483	4571	4088	12%	Merseyside (Met County)
1539	14948	13409	11%	LONDON
392	4637	4245	9%	Inner London

### Source:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/monthlyfiguresondeathsregisteredbyareaofusualresidence>

The table above is from the same source and shows mortality numbers rose the most in the Midlands. Incidentally in areas that mostly strongly voted Leave in the 2016 referendum. They rose by national average rates in the North West; but much more in more rural and older Lancashire than in urban Merseyside. They rose the least in London, especially inner London.

The inquiry will have its work cut out explaining by middle Britain was so badly hit and why almost all of England also suffered. The final table below shows the few areas of England with experience a fall in mortality during these two years.

### The few areas of England with a fall mortality Q1 2016 to Q1 2018

Increase in deaths	Deaths in three months			District
	Q1 2018	Q1 2016	% rise	
-1	192	193	-1%	South Bucks
-3	496	499	-1%	Milton Keynes
-2	180	182	-1%	Tamworth
-4	352	356	-1%	Fareham
-14	326	340	-4%	Haringey
-24	444	468	-5%	Colchester
				Bath and North East
-28	446	474	-6%	Somerset
-20	298	318	-6%	Hackney
-11	160	171	-6%	Epsom and Ewell
-18	252	270	-7%	Oxford
-1	11	12	-8%	City of London
-27	209	236	-11%	Kensington and Chelsea
-2	6	8	-25%	Isles of Scilly

**Source:**

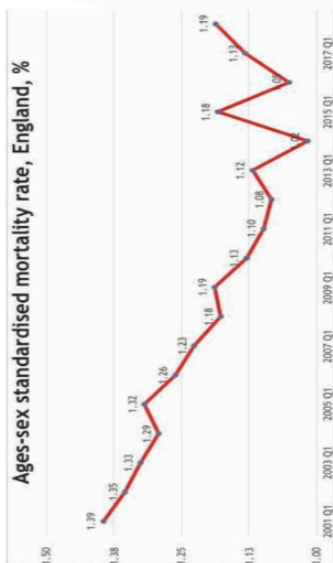
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# PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO RISING MORTALITY IN ENGLAND ANNOUNCED

Danny Dorling the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography of the School of Geography and the Environment of the University of Oxford discusses the public inquiry in to rising mortality and what it might tell us about life in an age of austerity.

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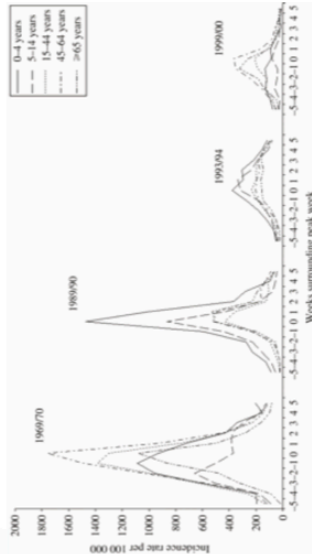
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