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Diverging trends in female old-age mortality: A reappraisal

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Abstract

Over the second half of the 20th century a number of divergences and convergences of mortality schedules were observed across the world. Some of these developments remain incompletely understood. In recent overviews of old-age female mortality Mesle and Vallin (2006, *Population and Development Review*) and Rau, Soroko, Jasilionis, and Vaupel (2008, *Population and Development Review*) describe two contrasting patterns of mortality change between the mid-1980s and the end of the 20th century: a pattern of a large decrease in mortality exhibited by France and Japan and a pattern of a smaller decrease, stability or a certain increase in mortality shown by Denmark, the United States and the Netherlands. No satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon has been proposed so far. This paper shows that the divergence is, to a very significant extent, due to the differential impact of smoking related mortality on female populations of France and Japan versus Denmark, the United States and the Netherlands. The end to the diverging trends is demonstrated. Other lifestyle factors potentially implicated in the divergence are also discussed.

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