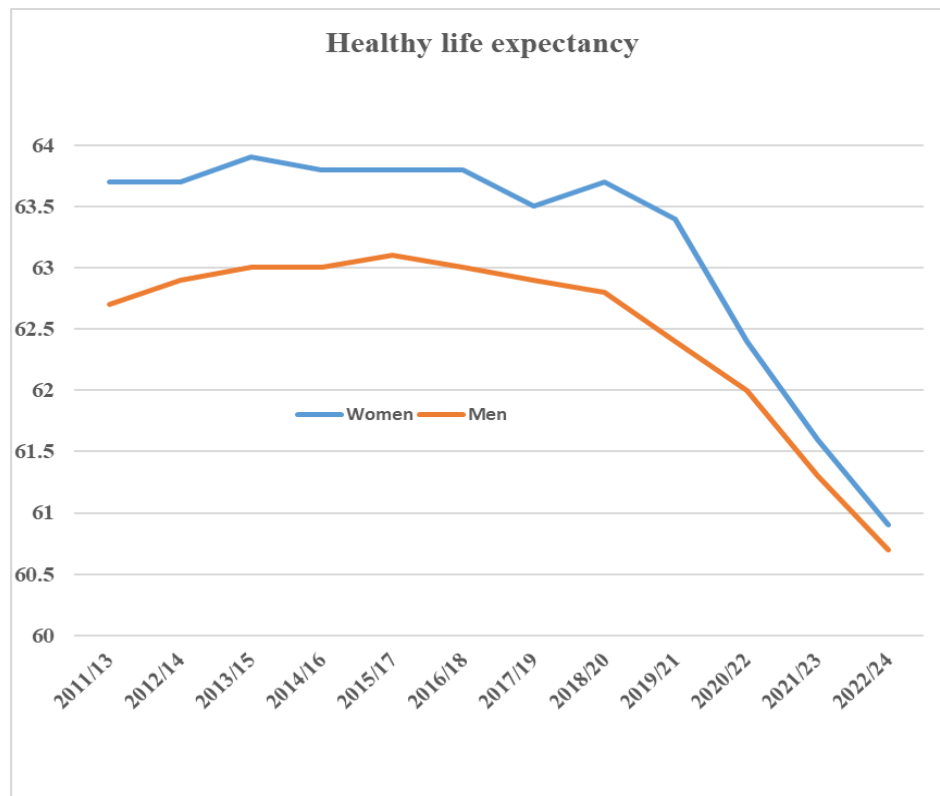


Healthy life expectancy figures

The Office for National Statistics' latest healthy life expectancy calculations. There has been a marked fall from previous years.

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Healthy life expectancy is a measure which arguably receives less attention than it should, given the impact that ill-health can have on financial planning, particularly in later life.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has just released its latest statistical [publication](#) on healthy life expectancy (HLE) covering the period 2022-2024. HLE is defined by the ONS as a measure of "health-related wellbeing [that] represents the average time an individual is expected to live in "very good" or "good" general health, based on how individuals perceive their general health."

HLE is thus a somewhat subjective yardstick, but with that in mind, the ONS data makes depressing reading...

- In 2022 to 2024, males in the UK could expect to spend 60.7 years (77% of life) in "good" general health, compared with 60.9 years (73%) for females; these were decreases of 1.8 and 2.5 years, respectively, compared with the last non-overlapping period (2019 to 2021).

- The measurement of life expectancy used in this comparison is '[period life expectancy](#)', which takes no account of the projected improvements in life expectancy that apply to more widely used life expectancy figures.
- Despite modest increases in life expectancy since 2019 to 2021, as the graph shows, healthy life expectancy (HLE) at birth in the UK, for both males and females, decreased to its lowest level since the ONS time series began in 2011 to 2013.
- England has the highest HLE at birth among UK constituent countries for both males (60.9 years) and females (61.3 years); Scotland had the lowest for males (59.1 years) and Wales had the lowest for females (58.5 years).
- In England, for both males and females, the South East remained the region with the highest HLE at birth (63.0 and 64.3 years, respectively), and the North East remained the region with lowest (57.0 and 56.9 years, respectively). The North East has had the lowest HLE at birth in every period since the ONS HLE time series began.
- The gap in HLE at birth across local areas of the UK, measured as the difference between highest and lowest 2.5% of figures, was 14.7 years for males and 15.8 years for females. For comparison, the local area life expectancy gaps for 2022 to 2024 were ten years for men and 9.4 years for women.

The ONS acknowledges that "The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to increased mortality during 2020, 2021 and 2022; some negative impact remains in the latest reporting period." However, the fall in HLE started gently in the mid-2010s and has fallen sharply from 2019 to 2021, going into the pandemic, through to 2022 to 2024, exiting the pandemic.

Comment

This data could both help explain the problems and the consequences of the strains within the NHS.

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