

Has working-age morbidity been declining?

Changes over time in general health,
chronic diseases, symptoms and biomarkers
in England 1994-2014

Ben Baumberg Geiger

Health Studies User Conference 2020 [online]

30th June 2020

<http://www.benbgeiger.co.uk>



My argument today:

Both methodological & substantive

1. Methodological: The challenges of analysing trends using HSE

2. Substantive: So *has* working-age morbidity been declining?

➡ *A lot of info vs. a little time...*

Taken from a recently published paper:
DOI 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-032378

Open access

Original research

BMJ Open Has working-age morbidity been declining? Changes over time in survey measures of general health, chronic diseases, symptoms and biomarkers in England 1994–2014

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Methodology: Challenges in analysing morbidity trends using HSE

- **Inconsistent inclusion of qs**
- **Incomparability** (often subtle):
 - Sampling (e.g. 1991-3)
 - Wording
 - Routing / eligibility (e.g. BMI)
 - Measurement (esp. biomarkers)

My approach is to systematically search for *all* relevant trends

- **Inclusion:** Search of all HSE questionnaires 1991-2014
- **Comparability:** Checking via data, documentation & other sources
- **Sampling:** only 25+ (communal ests), excludes 1991-3, new weights 1993-2014
- **Public resource** – ideally to be collaboratively built upon!

Substantively: is working-age morbidity really decreasing?

- **Widespread assumption** based on mortality data (recently reversed?)
- **Little evidence...**
- **...and that which exists is usually based on global self-reports...**

Substantively: is working-age morbidity really decreasing?

- **Here use 39 specific measures:**
 - Medical labels
 - Symptom-based
 - Biomarkers
- **Age/sex adjusted only**
- **Variable start/end dates of trends**
(see paper)

Cardiovascular/respiratory: *a priori* expect improvement

Cardiovascular



L: High blood pressure

B: High blood pressure



L: Heart attack/stroke/angina

S: Angina/TIA



L: Any recent CVD / CVD LSI

Respiratory



L: Asthma

S: Breathlessness / COPD

Obesity, diabetes, MH: *a priori* expect deterioration

Obesity, diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↑ B: Obesity / high waist-hip ratio↑ B: Diabetes↑ L: Diabetes
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↑ L: Mental ill-health≈ S: 'Moderate' mental ill-health↑ L: 'Severe' mental distress

Other morbidity domains: no clear *a priori* expectation

Activity
limitations,
pain, MSD

- ↑ S: Activity limitations 1994-6 to 2001-3
- ↓ S: Pain
- ↓ L: Arthritis

Other

- ↑ B: Raised fibrinogen
- ↓ B: Anemia / iron deficiency
- ↓ L: Eye/ear
- ↓ S: Hearing 1994-6 to 2001-3
- ≈ S: Seeing/communication 1994-6 to 2001-3

Conclusions from this very high-level summary

- **No sign of systematic morbidity improvement 1994-2014**
 - No overall measure of morbidity available
 - BUT no trend for falling morbidity to be seen in measures that predict SRH the most
- **We still need...**
 - Better impairment measures!
 - Better collaborative resources