

Trends in expected lifetime without and with activity limitations in Denmark

In Denmark life expectancy has increased since the mid-1990s after many years of stagnation. Moreover, during the past more than 20 years expected lifetime in good health among older Danes increased more than life expectancy.

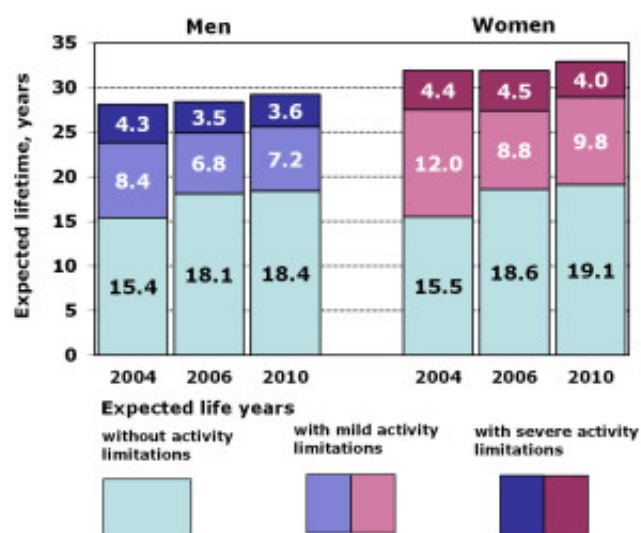


Fig. 1. Life expectancy at age 50, expected lifetime without activity limitations, with mild and severe activity limitations because of a health problem, Denmark 2004, 2006 og 2010

The multiplicity of dimensions of health is reflected in numerous summary measures of population health such as health expectancy indicators. For instance, disability-free life expectancy is in general use as an indicator for estimating expected lifetime without disability and is usually applied to describe the health state among the elderly.

The purpose of the study was to investigate recent Danish trends in health expectancy at age 50 and 65. Thus, trends during the period 2004-2011 were determined for three different health expectancy indicators. Expected lifetime in various health states in 2004, 2006 and 2011 were estimated by use of life table data combined with data from the Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe.

This summary presents results for disability-free life expectancy defined as expected lifetime without activity limitations based on answers to the question 'For the past 6 months at least, to what extent have you been limited because of a health problem in activity people usually do?' The response categories were 'not limited', 'limited, but not severely' and 'severely limited'.

It appears from the figure that expected lifetime without activity limitations at age 50 increased by 3.0 (18.4-15.4) years for men and by 3.6 (19.1-15.5) years for women from 2004 to 2011. Simultaneously, expected lifetime with mild and with severe activity limitations decreased for both genders. Thus, expected life years with mild or severe activity limitations was reduced by 1.9 and 2.6 years for men and women, respectively. The figure also demonstrates the so-called male-female health-survival paradox – the phenomenon that women live longer but with higher rates of disability and poor health than men.

The conclusion of the study is that among Danes over 50 years of age lifetime in good health increased substantially more than life expectancy and that the improvement is a continuation of a long-term trend.

Estimates of trends in disability-free life expectancy are important for retirement policy decisions. If increasing life expectancy results in more healthy years it might be considered to raising pension age. However, social inequality in life and health expectancy increases, why it might be unfair to fix a higher age of retirement independent of socio-economic position. Furthermore, the impact of continual economic up- and downturns on the social differentials on health should also be a matter of concern in policy making.

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Publication

[Improvement in health expectancy at ages 50 and 65 in Denmark during the period 2004-2011.](#)

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