

2017 OHE ANNUAL LECTURE

Why are Mortality Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White Non-Hispanic Americans?
Could it Happen in Europe?

Professor Anne Case and Professor Sir Angus Deaton

To be held at 6:00 pm, Thursday 15th June at The Royal Society
6-9 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AG

In this lecture Professor Anne Case and Professor Sir Angus Deaton will discuss their findings on US mortality and morbidity in the 21st Century (set out in two papers, Case and Deaton, 2015a, 2015b). The New York Times headline "Death Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White Americans" summarised their 2015 findings. This change reversed decades of progress in reducing mortality and was unique to the United States; no other rich country has to date seen a similar turnaround. The reversal was confined to white non-Hispanics. Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics at midlife, and those aged 65 and above in every racial and ethnic group, continued to see mortality rates fall. Last month (March 2017) they followed up with a new paper looking at reasons why this is happening – summarised by Forbes Magazine as "Explaining Why White Middle Aged America Is Killing Itself." They will set out their latest thinking and the policy implications.

In particular they will set out and discuss their findings of a:

- Marked increase in the all-cause mortality of middle-aged white non-Hispanic men and women in the United States between 1998 and 2015.
- Parallel increase in midlife morbidity. They found self-reported declines in health, mental health, and ability to conduct activities of daily living, and increases in chronic pain and inability to work.
- Rise in death rates from drug and alcohol poisonings, suicide, and chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis supporting evidence of growing midlife distress in this population.
- Mortality from alcohol, drugs and suicide have risen in a similar fashion in Scotland and Northern Ireland and, to a lesser extent, in England and Wales over the same period. However, more robust progress against heart disease has protected the UK from seeing all-cause mortality rates rise.
- Lack of evidence to support the view of many commentators that the poor mortality outcomes for US whites can be attributed to stagnant, and even declining, incomes. They find that the income profiles for blacks and Hispanics, whose mortality has fallen, are no better than those for whites, and there is no evidence from European data that mortality trends match income trends.
- Preliminary but plausible story of *cumulative disadvantage* over life, in the labour market, in marriage and child outcomes, and in health;

- View that this *cumulative disadvantage* is triggered by progressively worsening labour market opportunities at the time of entry for whites with low levels of education.
- Conclusion that these findings have profoundly negative implications for policies. Even ones that successfully improve earnings and jobs, or redistribute income, will take many years to reverse the mortality and morbidity increase. Those in midlife now are likely to do much worse in old age than those currently older than 65.

Professor Anne Case is the Alexander Stewart 1886 Professor of Economics and Public Affairs at Princeton University, where she is the Director of the Research Program in Development Studies. She has been awarded the Kenneth J. Arrow Prize in Health Economics from the International Health Economics Association, for her work on the links between economic status and health status in childhood, and the Cozzarelli Prize from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences for her research on midlife morbidity and mortality. Professor Case currently serves on the Advisory Council for the NIH-National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. She is a Research Associate of the NBER, and is an affiliate of the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town. In April 2017 she was elected as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She and Sir Angus Deaton were joint recipients of the 2017 Franklin Founder Award.

Professor Sir Angus Deaton is Senior Scholar and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professor of Economics and International Affairs Emeritus at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Economics Department at Princeton University. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a Fellow of the Econometric Society and, in 1978, was the first recipient of the Society's Frisch Medal. He was President of the American Economic Association in 2009. In 2012 he was awarded the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award. In 2014 he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. In 2015 he was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences and won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. In 2016, he was made a Knight Bachelor for services to economics and international affairs.

References:

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton, 2015a. "Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanics Americans in the 21st century," PNAS, December 8, 112(49), 15078-83.

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton, 2015b. "Suicide, age, and wellbeing: an empirical investigation," NBER Working Paper 21279, Cambridge, MA.

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton, 2017. Mortality and morbidity in the 21st century. Brookings Panel on Economic Activity (BPEA) Conference Drafts, March 23–24, 2017.

To register, please click [here](#). If you have any questions, please contact Kerry Sheppard (ksheppard@ohe.org).

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