Life course influences on old-age longevity: drivers of socioeconomic differences.

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Background.

• The recent increase in life expectancy at middle age has been too rapid to be due to genetic mutation.
• Most efforts to explain increased longevity have looked elsewhere: almost exclusively, to medical care innovation and behavioural change.
• Such narrowing of focus may be premature, because it ignores life course influences on social-biological processes.
Strachan-Sheikh model

Strachan-Sheikh model


Social policy and social science context:
• Pre-WWI: Rowntree surveys of poverty (standard of living life cycle); 1904 Inter-departmental Committee (school meals).
• 1930s: Boyd Orr surveys of child nutrition; Family Endowment Society (family allowances).
• WWII: Beveridge Report; full employment; food rationing.
• Post-WWII: welfare state (life course redistribution).


Socio-economic context:
• Spread of nuclear family; fewer children; better housing.
• Full employment (to mid-1970s).
• Rising real wages; nutrition.
• Holidays; shorter working week.
• Labour market niches; early retirement; disability benefit.

Emergence of *Third Age* (end of employment & family responsibilities to loss of functional independence):
- Occupational & private second pensions.
- Functionally healthy.
- Self-realisation & pleasure.

Social participation & networks confer resilience in face of adversity of ageing.

Nutrition; exercise.

Minimum Income for Healthy Living for retired.

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Life course questions.

- Are the drivers of increasing longevity the same as those driving socioeconomic differences in longevity?
- Is the biological effect of these improvements in the conditions of life cumulative or are there critical periods?
- Which social policies address past disadvantage as well as present need?