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Re: Rise in mortality in England and Wales in first seven weeks of 2018

Hiam and Dorlings [1] editorial and analysis is a welcomed contribution and timely prompt to keep the focus on the worsening health outcomes across England and Wales. Whilst evidence suggest life expectancy is likely to reduce for men and women in the United Kingdom (UK) [2], alongside a rise in infant mortality in the poorest families [3], it is critical attention remains focused on a key potential cause, austerity driven policy measures, especially for those in poverty.

One element of maintaining health outcomes for the population is a substantial Public Health programme to tackle the rise and financial burden of lifestyle related diseases such as obesity. Part of this programme, would be underpinned by the promotion of physical activity and healthy lifestyles. Sport is one possible vehicle for the promotion of physical activity, healthy and active lifestyles [4, 5, 6]. Yet within England, sport and leisure services and in turn opportunities have received unprecedented funding cuts [7].

Budgetary constraints in local authorities between 2008-onwards have subsequently resulted in an expenditure decrease for non-discretionary services including sport development and community recreation. This area of expenditure forms one component of sport-related services and primarily focuses on raising participation in 'hard-to-reach' groups. Research by Widdop et al [8] found that policy goals associated with raising and widening participation were not met to any significant degree between 2008 and 2014 as participation levels have changed little for lower income 'hard-to-reach' groups. These outcomes are potentially in part due to austerity measures reducing local authority expenditure.

As noted earlier, sport and physical activity can help contribute to reduced lifestyle related diseases and in turn, the associated financial burden of such diseases for the National Health Service. The economic constraint because of austerity driven policy measures by local authorities, not only appears to illustrate an example of a false economy, but also suggests that the cuts hit those in poverty most. Taking stock, as western countries seem to be recovering from the 2008 economic recession [9], austerity policies are still very much in place, and their impact will most likely continue to influence the lives of people, especially those in poverty, long after such policies are relaxed [10]. As such, there is little doubt that this editorial and analysis serves as welcomed encouragement for additional multidisciplinary research into the impact of austerity driven policies, now and into the future, especially for underserved groups such as those in poverty.

References –

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