

THE GLAGOW EFFECT

Host: Over a decade a census has tracked the ageing of the British, back in 1911, the average woman died at just 54 and the average man at 50 a solemn thought for those of us aged 51... These days, for a man it's 77.7 years and for a woman, 81.9 years. But those of course are just averages, no one's ever spoken to a statistic and behind the numbers there's a whole argument about lifestyle and about politics too.

Voice-over: So where is the place in Britain where the gulf in life expectancy is at its starkest? Glasgow. To find why Danny Dolling travelled the streets of the city starting in the affluent West End where he met public health expert Richard Mitchell.

Danny Dorling: What is the kind of life expectancy of people living right where we are now, what is it like just around here?

Richard Mitchell: Okay, for a man it's 79 years at birth. Just down the street there, it rises to 80 years, if you were to go that way may be about half a mile, you'd dropped about 5 years, and another half a mile on you'd dropped 15 years, so there's a big difference just in that direction. And actually, if you carried on in that direction, you go to some of the kind of poorer parts of the city where things get really bad.

Danny Dorling: it's extraordinary isn't it?

Richard Mitchell: it's extraordinary and that's the power of neighbourhood, because neighbourhood is the place in which your social life and your economic life come together to determine things.

Voice-over: In order to understand how you can drop 15 years of your life just by crossing a few streets, imagine a little life expectancy calculator. Let's start by giving Danny the national average number of years of life, and then we start to see how many things have an impact on how long you live. Take the job you do, if the census calls it "professional work" add 3 years, if it's unskilled manual labour take off 4 years.

Danny: In unskilled jobs, I mean, by the very name, you get low expectations, you don't feel so good about yourself when you're also being asked to do quite arduous work and it wears you down so over the years the difference is between what you're asked to do and what people think about you and what you people think about you has this effect which creates a seven year gap in life expectancy for men by social class.

Voice-over: Add a year if you drink in moderation.

Danny: If you're a heavy drinker, more than 14 units a week for a woman or 20 units for a man, you can take away as much as 3 years of you life expectancy but abstainers also have to take away a year for their life expectancy and that's because they include people like ex-alcoholics who no longer drink but have already done the damage to their livers.

Voice-over: If you've never smoked, add 3 years, if you're a smoker, take off 4 years.

Danny: if you're a smoker and you give up, you gain 4 years, but if you never smoked in the first place, compared to a smoker, you've got seven years gain.

Voice-over: If you eat fruit and veg once a day add a year, and the Glasgow Salad doesn't count.

Danny: What's your top 5 sellers here? What really sells?

Café owner: Chips, there's fish, some sausages, yeah, black pudding.

Danny: So do people get like black pudding and chips?

Café owner: Yes

Danny: Sounds great for me.

Café owner: That's wonderful, yeah, you'll be surprised.

Voice-over: Even your height seems to be connected to your life expectancy, men over 5 foot 10 inches (**1,77.5m**) add a year, under 5 foot 8 inches (**1,73m**), a year off.

Danny: Children who tend to not do so well in childhood, not to be fed so well or cared for so well are likely to be a bit shorter so it's a marker for how well you were brought up in childhood.

Voice-over: The numbers begin to drop dramatically if you find yourself homeless and on the street, subtract 12 years if you're living in a shelter, 25 years if you're living rough.

Danny: This is the Calton area of Glasgow which has one of the lowest life expectancies in Britain, around 54 years for men, that's the lowest in western Europe, the census has worked that out, but it also gives a clue as to why it is, the census shows us that when people do better in life they tend to leave an area like this, and when they fall on hard times, this is the kind of place they tend to move into.

Voice-over: It's the accumulated impact of all these numbers that begins to explain why the Reverend Malcom Cuthbertson of the impoverished Easterhouse estate frequently oversees funerals for residents barely into middle age.

Reverend Malcom Cuthbertson: Most people in the community will know of people who have died at an earlier age, there's no question about that, even family members, they could write a list of people that they know who have, you know in their 40's or 50's, died suddenly or even after long-term cancer, so it's not unusual within our community for that to be part of the people's thinking. I couldn't even remember having a 92 year old here and instead I probably have to go back like 5 years to one of my church elders Eddie who was 94, but that would be by far the exception in a community like this.

Voice-over: It isn't complicated, a roof over your head, a healthy lifestyle, a good job, but it's dramatic, which is why the census and the headstones in the wealthy suburb of Bearsden show lives lasting as much as 40 years longer than those of people just seven miles away.

Danny: the only other place in the world I've been to and found figures that compare with inequalities in health in Britain where people live such a long age in affluent parts and to such a short age in poorer parts is in the United States of America, but you have to do comparisons between Indian reserves in North Dakota and you know, people living in some of the mansions around Florida to get the same kind of gaps that we get in this country. There's nowhere else in Western Europe, Japan has remarkably low inequalities in health, Korea's not bad. Amongst rich countries in the world, there really only the United States where you can see the kind of gaps that we take for granted in this country and I think that is shocking.

Host: It's a sobering thought that there are places in this country where the age of death has not improved: just the same as it was 100 years ago. but the biggest change is at the other end of the spectrum. The queen is in danger of getting writer's cramp, because this census is going to focus on the fastest growing age group of all : centenarians.