

# Women now live longer than men even in poorest countries

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2006 is likely to be the first year in human history when, across almost all the world, women can expect to outlive men, say researchers from the University of Bristol and the University of Sheffield in this week's BMJ.

The trend towards this remarkable achievement will probably be confirmed this week in the 2006 world health report.

"We tend to forget that in many countries of the world women could expect, until recently, to live fewer years than men and that maternal death in particular remains a big killer," write Professor George Davey Smith of the University's Department of Social Medicine and colleagues.

In Europe, men last outlived women in the Netherlands in 1860 and in Italy in 1889. Elsewhere females' life expectancy has long exceeded males': in Sweden since 1751, Denmark since 1835, England and Wales since 1841.

But in all western European countries the life expectancy gap between women and men is now narrowing.

Greater emancipation has freed women to demand better health care and to behave more like men, and most importantly to smoke, say the authors. As this transition is so recent, the processes driving it cannot be purely biological: they relate primarily to social change.

"We must remember, though, that life expectancy data apply from birth

onwards, so the picture would be different in some countries if life expectancy from conception was considered," they add.

"But even the life expectancy from birth may not be a permanent achievement, given that the largest remaining untapped market for cigarettes in the world is made up of women living in poorer countries," they conclude.

Source: University of Bristol

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