

Britain lags behind in reducing infant mortality and child poverty

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Britain has the fourth highest rate of infant mortality of all Western countries. More seriously, the high death rates of British children correlate with high child poverty and with a lack of investment in healthcare, according to research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Britain has a [child mortality](#) rate of 1630 deaths per one million children, according to the study, which was led by Professor Colin Pritchard of Bournemouth University. The top performing countries - Finland and Sweden – have almost half that rate with 911 and 919 [child deaths](#) per million, respectively.

'Although Britain just managed to meet the UN millennium goal of reducing child deaths to two per cent by 2015, Britain is still way behind the majority of other Western nations,' says Professor Pritchard. 'Indeed, the [infant mortality](#) rate in Britain is higher than in Greece or Portugal despite their struggling economies, who used to have the highest rate in the West. Indeed if we had the same rate as Portugal there would be more than 1,200 fewer British deaths'

The study compares the situation in Britain with twenty other Western countries. It examines [child mortality rates](#) in the context of each nation's relative poverty index (the gap between the income of the richest 20 per cent of the population and that of the poorest 20 per cent). It shows that Britain's wealthiest people receive 7.2 times the income of its poorest people, while in Finland, for example, the difference is only

3.7 times.

'We found inequality to be highly correlated with child mortality,' says Professor Pritchard. 'Those countries that had a wide income gap, also had a high rate of child deaths. It is significant, therefore, that Britain has the third widest levels of income inequality in the Western world.'

Also significant, according to the study, is the percentage of national income spent on health services. In this respect, Britain is again falling behind other Western countries, with healthcare expenditure averaging only 6.9 per cent of the national income between 1980 and 2013. This is the lowest rate of all Western countries. Indeed, France and Germany spent over a third more than Britain of national income on health, during this period.

However, the study shows that Britain scores highly for the cost effectiveness of its health service and argues that it achieves relatively more with less finance. Although Britain's child [mortality rates](#) are high compared to other countries, it has made good progress since 1979, reducing its infant mortality by 62 per cent.

Nonetheless, Professor Pritchard argues that Britain is currently failing its children. 'UNICEF states that child mortality rates are an indicator of how well a nation meets the needs of its children,' he says. 'The focus now must be on tackling the factors relating to poverty. Of course, if the UK reached and maintained the average health expenditure of the other countries that would also help.'

Provided by Bournemouth University

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