

Birth and Death in the United States

This presentation will cover research on recent developments in fertility and mortality in the United States and in comparison with peer countries. The first part of the presentation will describe fertility trends with a specific focus on the recent pandemic period. While U.S. fertility has followed a long-term downward trend that was accelerated in each economic recession, birth rates have experienced a surprising “baby bump” during the pandemic. This fertility increase was particularly strong for first births and among women with college degrees who were more likely to benefit from increased work flexibility. The second part of the talk will focus on death rates and U.S. longevity which has dramatically fallen behind peer countries in recent decades. This “American Death Problem” is not driven by increasing income inequality or the legacy of racial disadvantage — on the contrary racial and some income disparities in mortality have actually improved in the decades leading up to the pandemic. The United States has been falling behind as a whole, and even in the richest U.S. areas mortality rates exceeds those in comparable European areas. When the pandemic struck, life expectancy losses in the United States were larger than in any European country and a significant share of excess deaths were not due to Covid-19 but the result of a pandemic-induced social crisis.