

Early Life and Mortality in Belgium during the 19th Century: a Longitudinal Survey

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Abstract

For 18 months, the GÉDAP has started a new project which tends to develop the issue on possible linkages between living conditions in early life and mortality at advanced ages in the historical context of the 19th century in Belgium.

Our study is based on the main hypothesis that relation between living conditions in early life and mortality at advanced ages does exist. In order to test it, we have chosen 3 generation groups which were born and lived their very first years during specific periods: 1846-48, 1860-61 and 1875-80.

In few words, we can justify this choice by the fact that the first group 1846-48 were born during a subsistence crisis period... while the following ones who were born in the 1860-61 years has benefited from relative good living conditions. Then, coming the 1875-80 generations which were born and lived during a new unfavourable period due to the beginning of the Industrial Great Depression combined with a new subsistence crisis in countryside areas, and which led to a new demographic regime with the emergence of changes in fertility behaviour.

With regard to historical context, we have considered individuals all born in Châtelet, a city located in the coal-mining basin of Charleroi. And owing to communal registers, we were able to follow them from the birth to the death, taking in account many covariates such as instruction level or event history related to nuptiality, family, migration, "professional career"...

At this time, data collection is still in progress on individuals and will be soon completed with contextual variables such as annual rates of infant mortality, evolutions in cereal price variations, density... However – in using event history analysis - we have already collected enough information on the two first generation groups so as to make some preliminary analysis which seems to confirm a generation effect on death event occurrence (analysis based on a sample greater than 400 individuals).

In consequence, in following three generation groups during the 19th century, this communication would give us occasion to present both, deeper and most recent analysis on

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possible impact from living conditions in early life on mortality at advanced ages, and what could be the specific conditions and modalities of this impact.