

CHAPTER 2

LIFE EXPECTANCY



2. LIFE EXPECTANCY

Here in Ireland, for every seven women who are aged sixty-five years of age or over, there are five men, and amongst those who are eighty-five years of age or over, there are three women for every one man (Murphy-Lawless 2003 p.11).

TABLE 1.4 LIFE EXPECTANCY, SOUTH AND NORTH, AT BIRTH AND AT 65 YEARS, 2002

Years	RoI				NI			
	At birth		At 65 years		At birth		At 65 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1925 - 1927	57	58	13	13	55	56	12	13
1950 - 1952	65	67	12	13	66	69	12	14
1960 - 1962	68	72	13	14	68	72	12	14
1970 - 1972	69	74	12	15	68	74	12	15
1985 - 1987	71	77	13	16	71	77	13	17
1990 - 1992	72	78	13	17	73	78	14	18
1995 - 1997	73	79	14	17	74	79	15	18

Sources: CSO(2000a), Republic of Ireland and NISRA, Northern Ireland (2002).

- Life expectancy at birth provides one of the broadest indicators of the overall health of a population. Life expectancy at birth has increased, substantially, for Irish men and women over the past four decades, although life expectancy is still poorer for men (Table 1.4). According to Murphy-Lawless (2003), the reasons for gains for both sexes include the following:
 - Control over infectious diseases;
 - Other scientific and medical advances;
 - Improved public health measures, like sanitation;
 - Better housing conditions;
 - Better nutrition.

- According to figures shown in Table 1.4, a baby boy or girl born in 1925 in the RoI could expect, on the basis of mortality figures at that time, to live on average to about 57 years of age. By contrast, the life expectancy for people born in 1996 was on average 73.5 for boys and 79 for girls, both north and south. Hence what was once a minor difference in life expectancy has widened into a perceptible gap of 5.5 years. This gap between the sexes is subsequently resulting in a growing female-dominant population amongst those over sixty-five years of age.

- Life expectancy is broadly comparable in both north and south of the country. Female life expectancy at birth is 79 in both jurisdictions, and male life expectancy at birth is 73 in the RoI and 74 in NI. In Northern Ireland, male life expectancy has increased by three years and female life expectancy by two years over the last decade (CSO 2002b).
- Life expectancy for males at birth in the RoI is the 3rd lowest in the EU and lowest of all EU countries at age 65 (Eurostat 2000; Stakelum and Boland 2001). On average, Irish males can expect to live to 73.9 years, British men to 75 years, while Swedish men make it to 77.1 years (Eurostat 2000).
- In both the RoI and NI, projected life expectancy figures for 2000-2002 are as follows:

Males:	at birth 73.8 and at 60 years 17.9
Females:	at birth 79.5 and at 60 years 22.1

There is still, however, a notable gap between the sexes of 5.7 years at birth, and 4.2 years at sixty years. Epidemiologists and health researchers point to four broad elements that may contribute to our understanding of this difference in outcomes between the sexes:

- 1 Biological/genetic differences between men and women (Ramey, 1997; Kraemer 2001).
- 2 Material and social differences and structural inequalities (Phillipson 1995; Fahey and Murray 1994).
- 3 Cultural and behavioural differences linked to different social expectations of men and women (Skakelum and Boland 2001; Waldron 1985).
- 4 Gendered use of and access to the health services (Stakelum and Boland 2001; O'Dowd and Jewell 1998; Senior and Viveash 1998).