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Life Expectancy in Central and Eastern European Countries and Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union: Changes by Gender

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Aim. To examine changes in life expectancy at birth for countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS) for the period 1989-1996. Differences in the change by gender were examined and several factors which likely bear on the changes were discussed.

Methods. Data from the WHO Health for All European Data Base were used to determine changes in life expectancy and selected economic factors for CEE and NIS countries.

Results. Changes in life expectancy varied by gender in both CEE and the NIS, with the difference increasing for the two groups during the period with the largest increase occurring in the NIS. Both male and female life expectancy declined, with male life expectancy dropping at a more rapid rate. In 1994, the year in which most, but not all countries, reached a low point, life expectancy for males had declined below 60 years for two countries.

Conclusions. The most striking point about the decline in life expectancies was the short period in which the declines occurred, especially in the NIS. It is not possible to determine the exact cause for the changes, but there are likely multiple reasons. It is not completely clear why the decline in life expectancy was greater for males, although the linkage between economic and behavioral and lifestyle factors appear to have some association. Further research is necessary to determine why effects by gender vary so greatly and whether the negative outcomes are a short-term anomaly or will persist.

Key words: gender; health behavior; life expectancy; life style; longevity; quality of life; social environment; sex differences; sex ratio