

International Comparisons in Underserved Health Issues, Policies, Needs and Projections



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KEYWORDS

- International health care • Global health care statistics • Health care spending
- Universal health care • Health care technology

KEY POINTS

- Primary care physicians/providers worldwide need to be aware of the issues and obstacles faced by the underserved patients they serve.
- Primary care physicians need to be aware of the changing issues involved with providing health care to underserved populations.
- Primary care physicians can participate in solving current and future challenges such as improving access to care, embracing new technologies, improving patient education, and being sensitive to the social/cultural prejudices.

Globally, there have been vast improvements in health over the past several decades, rapidly decreasing—but not eliminating—disparities between high-income and low-income countries. In the latter, the average life expectancy has increased rapidly—by 9 years in just the period from 1990 to 2012 (Fig. 1), and the difference in life expectancy between high-income countries and low-income countries has shrunk from 22 years to 17 years (Fig. 2). Excluding sub-Saharan Africa, the life expectancy gap is only 9 years.¹ Both infant mortality and mortality among those less than 5 years of age have decreased by nearly one-half, equivalent to a staggering 17,000 fewer child deaths each day.¹ Mothers are now more likely than ever to survive childbirth; the maternal mortality rate in low-income countries has decreased from 900 per 100,000 live births to 450 per 100,000 live births, largely owing to better prenatal care and increases in facility births. Similar proportional decreases have been evidenced in lower middle and upper middle income countries.²

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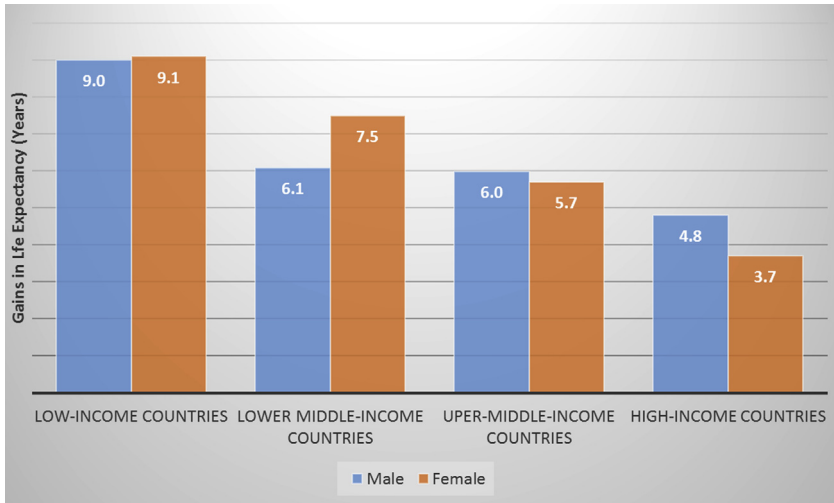


Fig. 1. Years gained in life expectancy 1990 to 2012, by sex and country income group. (From World Health Statistics 2014. A wealth of information on global public health. WHO. Available at: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112739/1/WHO_HIS_HSI_14.1_eng.pdf?ua=1. Accessed June 10, 2016; with permission.)

Households in low-income countries, on average, are enjoying a higher quality of life than ever before. Currently, 90% of the world's population has access to safe drinking water and almost two-thirds have access to adequate sanitation.¹ Measles vaccination rates have reached 80% of children, and nearly three-quarters of births are

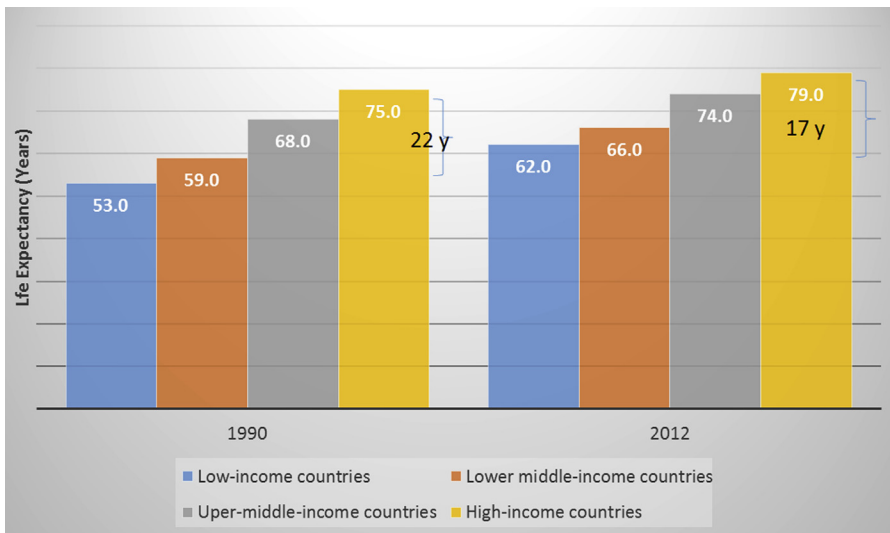


Fig. 2. Life expectancy (years) by level of income. (From World Health Statistics 2014. A wealth of information on global public health. WHO. Available at: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112739/1/WHO_HIS_HSI_14.1_eng.pdf?ua=1. Accessed June 10, 2016; with permission.)

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