

Infant Mortality and Social Class in Victorian Scotland

It is undisputed that there were large differences in infant mortality between different social classes in the Victorian era (Preston and Haines; Watterson; Woods and Williams), but the reasons behind these are less clear and the sources most commonly available for the second half of the nineteenth century rarely permit the simultaneous examination of more than one of social class, cause of death or the different ages of infancy. There is therefore relatively little understanding of the routes through which social class or status affected survival among the young: how much was due to better nutrition, better sanitation, more health-related knowledge, lower overcrowding, fewer neighbourhood hazards, among other factors.

This paper will examine the influences on the risk of infant death for two contrasting places in Scotland in the late nineteenth century, the Isle of Skye in the Inner Hebrides and the lowland town of Kilmarnock, using longitudinal data constructed from linked birth, marriage and death registers and decennial censuses. As expected, social class had a larger influence in the urban area, and the paper will explore routes through which social status may have affected survival by examining other variables and causes of death.

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