

IV

Mortality Differentials by Region

“Few features of the human aging process have such profound social and economic consequences as the sex differential in longevity” (Hazzard 1985).

Greater male mortality is almost universal throughout the world today. The table in Appendix B shows life expectancy at birth for males and females for 154 countries and 27 regions (United Nations Population Fund 1998). The countries and regions are shown in four orders: by the difference between female and male life expectancy, by male life expectancy, by female life expectancy, and in alphabetical order. In all cases, they are in decreasing order. In no region and in only one country, Nepal, is the life expectancy at birth for males greater than for females.

Greater sex mortality differential has historically been associated with low mortality—the current situation in former Soviet bloc countries is an exception. The greatest sex mortality differential in life expectancy for any country is 13.5 years in the Russian Federation. Other than former Soviet bloc countries, the greatest sex mortality differential in life expectancy is 8.3 years in France. It is interesting to note that, in 1984, alcohol consumption in Russia was probably at the highest level in the world—about 14 liters of pure ethanol per capita annually—whereas in France it was 13.5 liters per capita (Shkolnikov and Nemtsov 1997). The large sex mortality differential is attributable especially to high mortality among young

and middle-aged men (United Nations 1999). Overall mortality has been increasing in Russia since 1989, and the sex mortality differential in life expectancy in the former Soviet Union has been the highest in the world for many years (Kingkade and Arriaga 1997).

Explanations of the large sex mortality differential in former Soviet bloc countries center around male behavior attributable to the extremely poor economies. High unemployment and corruption, it is thought, have lead males, more than females, to adopt self-destructive behavior, such as excessive alcohol use, greater cigarette smoking, accidents, suicide, and homicide (Bobadilla et al. 1997; United Nations 1999). It is estimated that in Russia, men drink between 3.8 and 4 times the amount of alcohol consumed by women (Trembl 1997). A recent study found that two-thirds of Russian men die drunk, and that more than half of that number die in extreme stages of alcoholic intoxication. *“Everyone is drunk: murderers and their victims, drowning victims, suicides, drivers and pedestrians killed in traffic accidents, victims of heart attacks and ulcers”* (Reuters 2000). Smoking in the former Soviet Union is consistently high among males and, by comparison, is relatively low among females (Prokhorov 1997). The estimated percentage of deaths in the Russian Federation in 1990 due to smoking was 7.5 times higher for males of all ages than for females, and 6 times higher for males aged 35–69 than for females of those ages (Peto et al. 1994).

