Disparity in life spans of the rich and the poor is growing

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Joshua Bright / The New York Times

Patients at the Free Clinic in Newton, N.J. Researchers debate whether expanding access to health care will shrink the gap in life expectancy between the rich and the poor.

Experts have long known that rich people generally live longer than poor people. But a growing body of data shows a more disturbing pattern: Despite big advances in medicine, technology and education, the longevity gap between high-income and low-income Americans has been widening sharply.

The poor are losing ground not only in income, but also in years of life, the most basic measure of well-being. In the early 1970s, a 60-year-old man in the top half of the earnings ladder could expect to live 1.2 years longer than a man of the same age in the bottom half, according to an analysis by the Social Security Administration. Fast-forward to 2001, and he could expect to live 5.8 years longer than his poorer counterpart.

New research released this month contains even more jarring numbers. Looking at the extreme ends of the income spectrum, economists at the Brookings Institution found that for men born in 1920, there was a six-year difference in life expectancy between the top 10 percent of earners and the bottom 10 percent. For men born in 1950, that difference had more than doubled, to 14 years. For women, the gap grew to 13 years, from 4.7 years. “There has been this huge spreading out,” said Gary Burtless, one of the authors of the study.

The growing chasm is alarming policy makers, and has surfaced in the presidential campaign. During a Democratic debate, Senator Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton expressed concern over shortening life spans for some Americans. “This may be the next frontier of the inequality discussion,” said Peter Orszag, a former Obama administration official now at Citigroup, who was among the first to highlight the pattern. The causes are still being investigated, but public health researchers say that deep declines in smoking among the affluent and educated may partly explain the difference.

Overall, according to the Brookings study, life expectancy for the bottom 10 percent of wage earners improved by just 3 percent for men born in 1950 compared with those born in 1920. For the top 10 percent, though, it jumped by about 28 percent. (The researchers used a common measure – life expectancy at age 50 – and included data from 1984 to 2012.)

(www.nytimes.com. Adaptado.)

No trecho do quinto parágrafo “For the top 10 percent, though, it jumped by about 28 percent.”, o termo em destaque pode ser substituído, sem alteração de sentido, por

(A) otherwise.

(B) furthermore.

(C) therefore.

(D) however.

(E) whenever.

O trecho em destaque tem valor de oposição, podendo, portanto, ser substituído por “however”.