

# High and low, a map of how education affects longevity

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Americans are living longer, but the gains in life span are accruing disproportionately among the better educated, according to a new report by researchers from the University of Wisconsin.

Researchers have long known of the correlation between education and length of life, but the report provides a detailed picture of what that link looks like across more than 3,000 counties.

The study uses government data to rank each U.S. county by health indicators like obesity, smoking, drinking, physical inactivity and premature death. It even considers factors like the density of fast-food restaurants in a county.

Its findings show that the link between college education and longevity has grown stronger over time. Prema-

ture death rates differed sharply across counties, and a lack of college education accounted for about 35 percent of that variation from 2006 to 2008, the most recent years available, said Bridget Booske Catlin, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, who directed the study. That was up from 30 percent over an equivalent period seven years earlier.

The study defines premature deaths as those that occur before age 75 and are often preventable.

The findings offered fresh evidence that Americans' fortunes are diverging by education level. Education has emerged as an important predictor of good health and future earnings, but its unequal distribution among towns and cities has led to an increasingly uneven geography of well-being in the country.

According to the findings, when average postsecondary education levels increased by one year, there was a 16 per-

cent decline in years of life lost before age 75, Ms. Catlin said.

There were vast gaps in health and longevity by geography. In New York State, for example, Putnam County was the healthiest, with just 8 percent of its residents in poor or fair health, compared with 25 percent in the Bronx, which had the worst health of any county in New York. Adult obesity was about the same in both places — around a third of the population.

The premature death rate in the Bronx, 8 out of 100, was nearly double the rate in Putnam, 4.4 out of 100. Fast-food restaurants made up 44 percent of restaurants in Putnam County, compared with 62 percent of restaurants in the Bronx.

The gap in education was correspondingly stark. More than 90 percent of teenagers in Putnam County graduated from high school, compared with 60 percent of those in the Bronx, and 70 percent of adults attended some college, compared with 47 percent of adults in the Bronx.

