

Health Equity in the Nordic Region

22 – 23 November 2018, Stockholm

Place: Bryggarsalen at Odenplan in Stockholm (Norr tullsgatan 12N), Sweden

Time: 22 November 10.00 – 23 November 12.00

Moderators: Cecilia Garme (freelance journalist, Sweden), Louise Hertzberg (Senior adviser, Nordic Welfare Centre)

Thursday 22 November

9.15 Registration opens

Morning coffee and a sandwich will be served

10.00 – 10.10 Opening Speech

The Minister for Health and Social Affairs, Sweden (Name TBC)

10.10 – 10.40 Why social inequalities in health are unacceptable and what we can do to reduce them

Terje Andreas Eikemo, Professor of sociology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, Trondheim

10.40 – 11.00 Increasing income inequality in the Nordics

Jesper Roine, Associate professor of economics at the Stockholm School of Economics and Deputy director at the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (SITE)

11.00 – 11.20 Break

11.20 -11.50 Sick of inequality?

Therese Nilsson, Associate professor of economics at Lund University and at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN)

11.50 – 12.10 Discussion

12.10 – 13.10 LUNCH

13.10 – 13.40 Equality and social cohesion: the social contract in a comparative and historical context

Lars Trägårdh, PhD in history from UC Berkeley, Professor of history at Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College in Stockholm

13.40 – 14.00 Discussion

14.00 – 14.30 Health behaviour in school-aged children – what does the HBSC-study tell us about young people in the Nordics?

Pernille Due, Dr.Med.Sci, Professor at the University of Southern Denmark and the National Institute of Public Health, Denmark

14.30 – 15.00 Coffee break

15.00 – 15.45 **Parallel sessions**

Themes

- Policies for equal health on a national level
- Tools for policymaking on a national level
- Why is it important to measure positive mental health among school-aged children?
- Addiction and health inequalities

15.45 – 16.00 **Break**

16.00 – 16.20 **Inequality and interventions – how can inequality be reduced?**

Per-Olof Östergren, Professor in social medicine and global health at Lund University

16.20 – 16.40 **Discussion**

16.40 – 16.50 **Summary**

Mingle

Friday 23 November

9.30 – 9.35 **Introduction**

9.35- 10.05 **The shadow of happiness – how equal is the Nordic happiness?**

Michael Birkjær, Analyst at Happiness Research Institute in Denmark, holds a MSc in Political Science from Copenhagen University

10.05 – 10.30 **Young men's health in the Nordic countries**

Sven Bremberg, MD, PhD, Senior consultant at the Public Health Agency of Sweden, Associate professor, Department of Public Health, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm

10.30 – 10.45 **Discussion**

10.45 – 11.00 **Break**

11.00 – 11.30 **How does education policy affect health inequality?**

Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, Research director at the Centre for Education Economics, PhD student at the London School of Economics, Affiliated researcher at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics

11.30 – 11.50 **Discussion**

11.50 – 12.00 **Closing Speech**

About the conference

The WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, published in 2008, calls for closing the social gap in health within a generation. To achieve this goal, some dilemmas must be addressed.

Despite well-developed welfare policies, the relative social differences in health have increased more in the Nordics than in other parts of Western and Southern Europe. There is no obvious explanation and the conference will address this paradox. Young people, and especially young men, are particularly affected by the growing social gaps. Accordingly, young people's health and life conditions are essential themes during the conference.

One possible explanation for the growing health gap is income differences. The connection between inequalities in income and inequalities in health will be discussed. For the nation state, income redistributions might be an appropriate measure to counteract income differences. Yet, the legitimacy of such procedures is not given in a globalised world. Another important factor might be shortfalls in the educational systems. Research show a connection between low education and poor health and some proposals to amend these shortfalls will be presented. Some researchers point out that all inequality is not equally bad, and that focus should be on equal opportunities rather than on equal outcome. This statement also calls for a discussion about the role of the state and what interventions shall be prioritized.

During 2016 – 2018 the Nordic Council of Ministers has financed Nordic projects to strengthen good and equal health. Parallel sessions offer an opportunity for important learnings on how to work with equal health on a national level.

Presentations:

Why social inequalities in health are unacceptable and what we can do to reduce them

Terje Andreas Eikemo

Inequality kills. Despite remarkable declines in morbidity and mortality rates over the last few decades, socio-economic inequalities have been documented across the globe. The Nordic countries are not an exception. Eikemo will explain why health inequalities are troublesome at many levels. He will present their magnitude, their explanations, and suggest policies that can effectively buffer or even reduce inequalities in health.

Terje Andreas Eikemo is Professor of sociology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. Eikemo is leading Norway's first Centre for the study of social health inequalities (CHAIN). CHAIN aims to monitor, explain and reduce inequalities in health globally through actionable research in collaboration with international organisations, such as UNICEF, GAVI, MSF, IARC, and EuroHealthNet.

Increasing income inequality in the Nordics

Jesper Roine

The increase in income inequality in the Nordics have been among the largest in the OECD area. This has led to a debate between those who see the rising income disparities as a threat to the Nordic welfare model and those who emphasise that the Nordics still remain among the countries with the most even income distribution. In this talk, Jesper Roine presents highlights from the report Nordic Economic Policy Review 2018.

Jesper Roine holds a Ph. D. from Stockholm University and is Associate professor of economics at the Stockholm School of Economics. He is also Deputy director at the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (SITE). In 2014 Roine wrote a summary in Swedish of Thomas Piketty's book Capital in the Twenty-First Century.

Sick of inequality?

Therese Nilsson

There is a clear trend in rich countries that the gap between rich and poor is widening. This is also true for the Nordic countries. What does this increasing inequality mean for our health? Does income inequality affect outcomes such as obesity, life expectancy and subjective well-being? Is all inequality equally bad? Should we focus more on how the inequality is produced than on the size of the gap? In her talk Therese Nilsson will assess the relationship between inequality and health.

Therese Nilsson is Associate professor of economics at Lund University and at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN). Her research comprises various aspects of the nexus of inequality, globalization and health. Among other things she has researched the relationship between income inequality and individual health.

Equality and social cohesion: the Nordic social contract in a comparative and historical perspective

Lars Trägårdh

What role does the nation-state and citizenship have in a globalized world? Applying the concept of statist individualism Trägårdh will discuss the moral logic underpinning the Nordic welfare state – a strong alliance between the citizen and the state, a high level of social trust, and strong confidence in common institutions. Based on the situation in Sweden, Trägårdh will discuss how current developments in the Nordic countries may affect trust, social cohesion, and the social contract.

Lars Trägårdh earned his PhD in history at UC Berkeley, has taught at Barnard College, Columbia University, and is now Professor at Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College in Stockholm. He currently leads an extensive research project on social cohesion in a time of rising inequality, diversity, and migration.

What does the Health behaviour in school-aged children study tell us about young people in the Nordics?

Pernille Due

For over 30 years the Health behaviour in school-aged children study (HBSC) has been a pioneer cross-national study gaining insight into young people's well-being and health behaviours.

Pernille Due will present learnings from HBSC about young people in the Nordics. Due's presentation gives an introduction to the parallel session on measuring positive health among school aged children.

Pernille Due, Dr.Med.Sci, is currently Professor at the University of Southern Denmark and the National Institute of Public Health, Denmark.

Inequality and Interventions – how can inequality be reduced?

Per-Olof Östergren

Individuals with low levels of education systematically have worse health than those with higher education. A rapid review was carried out to examine the impact of targeting health-related behaviours. The main conclusion is that solid evidence is lacking for interventions targeting behavioural factors among individuals with low levels of education. To reduce health inequalities a more systematic approach is needed.

Per-Olof Östergren, MD, is currently professor in social medicine and global health at Lund University.

The shadow of happiness

Michael Birkjær

On average, Nordic people live good lives. Yet, a substantial share of the population experience loneliness, stress, depression, and a general sense of meaninglessness. How are experiences of wellbeing and ill-being distributed across the Nordic populations?

Michael Birkjær, Analyst at the Happiness Research Institute, holds a MSc in Political Science from Copenhagen University. The Happiness Research Institute is an independent think tank, on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers the institute has written the report "Skyggen af lykken" (The shadow of happiness).

Young men's health

Sven Bremberg

The increase in health inequalities in the Nordics is most apparent amongst young men, aged 15 – 29. The main causes are increase of drug use disorders, neck- and back pain, suicides and injuries due to interpersonal violence. The cause of the increased social inequality among young men has not yet been settled. In this talk, Bremberg examines different explanations.

Sven Bremberg, MD, PhD is Senior consultant in child and adolescent health at the Public Health Agency of Sweden and Associate professor, Department of Public Health, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm. He has been a main contributor to a Swedish national strategy to tackle social inequalities in health and has been responsible for different governmental commissions.

How does education policy affect health inequality?

Gabriel Heller Sahlgren

In the Nordics differences in health can to a large extent be explained by differences in education, rather than income. International empirical research suggests that progressive learning methods, used to a considerable extent in the Nordics, may reinforce differences between socio-economic groups. Based on existing research and new analyses, the presentation will conclude with education-policy proposals for the purposes of decreasing health inequality.

Gabriel Heller Sahlgren is Research director at the Centre for Education Economics in London, a PhD student at the London School of Economics, and an Affiliated researcher at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics in Stockholm. He is the author of numerous publications on issues relating to social policy, including Real Finnish Lessons: The True Story of an Education Superpower.

Parallel sessions

Policies for equal health on a national level

What policies, measures and working methods seems to be most appropriate for reducing social inequalities in health? What is the value of cross-sectorial cooperation at departmental level, does it take place, and does it work? On the seminar, tentative conclusions from two Nordic projects that addresses policies and the policy making process will be presented.

Seminar leaders: Karin Guldbrandsson, The Public Health Agency of Sweden. Elisabeth Fosse, The University of Bergen.

Tools for policymaking on a national level

Indicators, based on processed and standardized data, and policy briefs are excellent tools for policy work on equal health. At the seminar, Nordic projects will present why indicators and policy briefs are needed and how these tools can support and reinforce each other in the policymaking process.

Seminar leaders: Tuulia Rotko, The National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland. Else-Karin Grøholt, Public Health Agency, Norway.

Why is it important to measure positive mental health among school-aged children?

At the seminar Nordic researchers will discuss the importance of developing tools and methods for reaching more in-depth knowledge on the positive dimension of mental well-being. The researchers will also present some highlights from the latest HBSC-study concerning communication with parents, school pressure, life satisfaction and self-rated excellent health.

Seminar leader: Lidija Kolouh-Söderlund, Nordic Welfare Centre.

Addiction and health inequalities

The seminar will give a presentation covering the broad approach regarding health inequalities related to addiction. Following the presentation, results from Nordic projects on alcohol, tobacco and cannabis will be presented. There will also be a briefing on how to find the most important findings from the project on cannabis use, control and treatment.

Seminar leaders: Nina Karlsson, Nordic Welfare Centre, Yaira Obstbaum-Federley, Nordic Welfare Centre, Nadja Frederiksen, Nordic Welfare Centre.