Unequal ageing in health: theories, causes and consequences

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(based on research carried out with Ilinca, S., Schmidt, A. and Zolyomi, E.)

BB Summer School in Social Welfare
Overview of the presentation

• Inequalities in ageing: a lifecourse approach to health
• Inequalities in health among the 65+ in Europe
• Assessing health inequalities in old-age: practicalities
Ageing and health inequalities

Intergenerational inequalities: do health inequalities increase with age?
More unequal in old-age... Why should we?

Arguments against:

• Age as the fundamental determinant of health at older age groups

• Causes of death at early age groups are particularly sensitive to socio-economic conditions: unintentional injury, suicide (Backlund et al 2007) → but beware of context: US studies (homicide) and mortality among middle-aged men in former USSR

• Selective mortality or the “survival of the fittest”
More unequal in old-age...
Arguments in favour

Arguments in favour:

• *Age-relatedness* (Mayer et al 1999): old-age creates specific challenges

• *Comulation hypothesis*: “Nature gives you the face you have at twenty. Life shapes the face you have at thirty.” (Coco Chanel)
Life is a path not a destination

Comulation hypothesis:

• (Dis)Advantages tend to accumulate along the life course: material, behavioral, and psychosocial factors (von dem Knesebeck, 2010)

Figure 2: Unemployment August 1974–November 1981 by levels of childhood distress.

• Determinants of health have a long lag (e.g. 10 years between smoking cessation and carcinoma, Dela Cruz et al, 2011)
A life-course approach to health inequalities in old-age

Source: Diana Kuh and the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA)
Ageing and health inequalities

Intragenerational inequalities: how unequal in health are older Europeans?
Current health inequalities among old-age population in Europe

Source: Ilinca et al (2016), based on EU-SILC data
Inequalities in health care access among old-age population in Europe

Source: Ilinca et al (2016), based on EU-SILC data
Inequalities in health determinants among old-age population in Europe

Source: Ilinca et al (2016), based on SHARE data
Evidence of low social mobility in Europe

Source: Ilinca et al (2016), based on SHARE data
What about acceding countries and Eastern partnership

- CIS: “no country for old-men”; large and rising inequalities 1990s (Walters & Suhrcke, 2005)... Small improvements since (Goryakin et al 2015)

- Western Balkans: limited comparative evidence (Eikemo et al, 2009)
Future health inequalities... Forget all you just saw

• Working conditions → Current old-age health inequalities (Molarius et al, 2006; Fors et al, 2007; Parker et al, 2013)

• Lifestyles and chronic conditions → Future old-age health inequalities?

• Evolving prevalence of determinants of health: tobacco epidemic

• Education not only the preserve of elites: reduced inequalities or greater self-selection of the poor

• Public policies: inequalities a price to pay for success?

• Persistent health inequalities, even in high income and egalitarian societies (Fors & Thorslund, 2014)
Back in the day... When Malboro man was rich and educated

Source: Ilincic et al (2016), based on EU-SILC data
Pitfalls and possibilities for assessing inequalities in old-age

• What makes for low/high socio-economic class among older people? (Lindelow 2006, Rodrigues et al, forthcoming)
• Life-course approach → choice of indicators
• Measuring the social gradient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gradient Measure</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Ratios</td>
<td>Illustrational/ease</td>
<td>Information loss, Limited data applicability, One-dimensional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Odds Ratios</td>
<td>Illustrational/ease, Possibility of including control variables</td>
<td>Information loss in the case of categorical SES variable, Data restrictions, One-dimensional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correlation index</td>
<td>Experience of total population, versions for continuous and categorical data</td>
<td>One-dimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope Index of Inequality</td>
<td>Experience of total population, Based on rankings, Possibility of including control variables</td>
<td>Sensitive to mean population health, Possible interpretational difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Index of Inequality</td>
<td>Experience of total population, Based on rankings, Possibility of including control variables</td>
<td>Possible interpretational difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration Index</td>
<td>Experience of total population, Based on rankings, Properties well understood, Multi-dimensional, Possible to decompose</td>
<td>Zero value does not imply equality in childcare use, Modification is necessary with binary dependent variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Medgyesi & Kalaverzou (2014)
Thank you very much