Social inequalities in health from different disciplinary perspectives

Elective course 10 ECTS Spring 2021
Course responsible: Signild Vallgårda, siva@sund.ku.dk

Teaching: A combination of lectures, discussions of texts and other student activities.

Programme:
8 February
Social categories used in health research. Policies towards health inequalities in Western European countries. Signild Vallgårda, professor in health policy analysis, University of Copenhagen.

Presentation: I am a historian focusing on policy aspects of health and health care. My research deals among other thing with social inequalities in health as a political problem and with social categories used in health policies and epidemiological research.

Content of lectures: Discussion of the content and implications of choices of categories in policies and in research. Presentations and discussion of policies addressing social inequalities in health in Western European countries.

Suggested readings:

15 February
Are social inequalities in health a new phenomenon? Tommy Bengtsson, professor in economic history and demography, Lund University.

Presentation: Most of my research has been how the economic and social development in the past have created opportunities and constraints for improvements in living conditions and health for different social groups. Another area of interest to me is how conditions in early life affects socioeconomic performance and health throughout life. In both areas, the data I have been using comes from a historical individual-level database for southern Sweden, linked to contemporary register data. In addition, I have been studying immigration to Sweden and population ageing based on register data. Most of my research forms part of international comparative projects.

Content of lectures:
The main theme of this lecture is how the social gradient in mortality have developed over time. Has the rich always had a health advantage comparative to the poor, or is it a recent
phenomenon? To be able to answer this question, we must start by analysing how mortality and causes of death have changed over time and the role of their determinants (diet, housing, personal hygiene, water and sanitation, public health measures, vaccination, and medical treatment). We then turn to the main question, how social difference in mortality at different ages have changed over the past 200 years. Special attention is given the data and methods that have been used until now and how to identify and overcome knowledge gaps.

Suggested readings:


22 February
Social inequalities in health in a life course perspective. Rikke Lund, professor in social medicine, University of Copenhagen.

Presentation:
I am a medical doctor of background and have throughout my research career focused on social determinants of health in population based studies. I am leading Copenhagen Aging and Midlife Biobank designed to study ageing in a life course perspective where social inequalities is a major focus.

Content of lectures: In the lectures we will discuss how the life course approach can provide knowledge on factors across the life course that influence health inequalities. Are we able to identify future points for prevention of social inequality in health outcomes by the life course approach? There will be a short introduction to the field of life course epidemiology and a more specific focus on evidence regarding life course factors and their contribution to health inequalities.

Readings:
Ben-Shlomo Y, Cooper R, Kuh D. The last two decades of life course epidemiology, and its relevance for research on ageing. Int J Epidemiol 2016;45:973-88

1 March

**Different views on health inequalities.** Rikke Lund, professor og Ingelise Andersen, associate professor of social medicine, University of Copenhagen.

*Presentation:*
Rikke Lund

Ingelise Andersen is a historian and social epidemiologist and studies causes and consequences of social inequalities in health

*Content of lectures:*
The Dutch epidemiologist Johan P. Mackenbach has studied social inequalities mainly at macro levels, i.e. comparing different European countries. He also asks the provocative question whether there is a causal relation between socioeconomic position and inequality in health. During the lecture we will discuss and analyse the different viewpoints this statement has entailed

*Suggested readings:*


15 March

**Reducing social inequalities. Do we know what works?** Ingelise Andersen

*Content of lectures:*
During the lecture, we will discuss interventions at the individual level and the structural. We will discuss the degree of evidence needed before an intervention is initiated.
**Suggested readings:**


12 April

**Economic inequality.** Niels Ploug, section director, person statistics, Statistics Denmark. Oral presentations

*Presentation:* I am an economist. I have worked with the issues of social and economic inequality much of my professional life as a researcher and research director at the Danish National Institute for Social Research and as an author of books and papers. Today I am the Director of Social Statistics at Statistics Denmark and an external lecture at the Economics Department at the University of Copenhagen giving courses in economic and social inequality.

*Content of lecture:* The lecture will focus on the most recent developments in economic inequality worldwide, in the US, Europe and Denmark. The academic discussion among economists on the role of economic inequality in the economy goes a long way back. The lecture will introduce you to the main arguments in this discussion and to the most recent developments in the empirical research on economic inequality.

*Suggested readings:* Thomas Piketty’s ‘Capital in the 21st century’ restarted the debate among economists as well as in the public on the role of economic inequality. The book is more than 700 pages. It will be an advantage to familiarise yourself with the main points from the book. (We will find an article about those.) Thomas Piketty’s most recent book ‘Capital and Ideology’ – which is more than 1000 pages – is also relevant for the issues of this lecture. In Danish you’ll also find relevant material in Niels Ploug: Økonomisk Ulighed i Danmark.
Oral presentations.

22 March
Unequal ageing: Health inequalities in later life
Stefan Fors, associate professor, Karolinska Institutet.

Presentation: I am sociologist by training and an associate professor of Public Health. As a social scientist working in health research, most of my research concern how the population health is developing over time, and how health problems are distributed between different groups in the population.

Content of lectures: Presentations and discussions on the development of social inequalities in health during ageing. Several issues will be addressed: Do social inequalities in health increase or decrease with age? To what extent are there social inequalities in age-bound health problems, such as cognitive decline, functional impairments, and multimorbidity? What are the mechanisms at play? What are the social consequences of poor health in old age?

Suggested readings:


19 April
Inequality in Health and Distributive Justice. Martin Marchmann Andersen, PhD, Associate Professor (in philosophy of public health). National Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark. Poster presentations.

Content of lectures:
I will present and examine different prominent theories of distributive justice in order to answer the question of whether (and to what extent) social inequalities in health are unjust.

Suggested readings:
Whitehead M. The concepts and principles of equity and health. WHO


26 April
Ethnic inequalities in health: the example of covid-19. Marie Norredam, professor in Migration Ethnicity and Health, University of Copenhagen.
Presentation: I am a medical doctor and public health researcher focusing on inequalities in health related to ethnicity, race and migrant background. My research concerns the impact of migration and ethnicity on health and access to health care – and is based on policy analyses as well as qualitative and quantitative methods.

Content of lectures: Discussion of the content and implications of inequalities in health related to migrant status and ethnic background with a special focus on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on migrants and ethnic minorities in Western European countries.

Suggested readings:
Spallek et al. What do we have to know from migrants’ past exposures to understand their health status? A life course approach. Emerging Themes in Epidemiology 2011, 8:6.

Lancet Brief on covid-19 among migrants in Scandinavia. To be published.

3 May
Social and ethnic inequalities in access to care. Signe Smith Jervelund, Associate Professor in health services research, University of Copenhagen.

Presentation: I have an educational background in public health sciences. My main area of research is social and ethnic (in)equality in access to, use and effects of healthcare services, including quality of healthcare, coordination of care, and the consequences for health management and healthcare delivery, in a national and international comparative perspective.

Content of lectures: Presentations of key concepts and central issues of social and ethnic inequality in access to healthcare along with discussions and exercises. We will touch upon, among other things: What is access? What is an equitable distribution of healthcare? Is equity in conflict with other aims in the healthcare system? How do we study equity in access to health? How is equity best assured?

Suggested readings:


**Portfolio exam**
Before the course: Five pages paper on social inequalities in your country, choose yourself which question you wish to address. Written individually. Upload the paper in Absalon.

Oral presentation in groups.

Poster presentation in groups.

Individual written assignment, should be uploaded in Digital Exam no later than ??..2020. Graded 7 step scale.

https://kurser.ku.dk/course/sfok20005u/2020-2021