



The differential impact of policies on child's health along the social gradient

Children's health is affected by many different determinants, some of which are amenable to policy interventions. Welfare services such as day care and school are important since children spend a lot of their time there. Ensuring equal access to high quality services will help level out social inequalities by providing all children with similar opportunities regardless of parental resources. Social position and level of education of the parents have been shown to affect the life chances of their children, and more so in societies with less universal public policies.

In some settings only parents with sufficient knowledge and economic resources will make sure that their children's growth and health is monitored by adequate professionals. In other settings, for instance Sweden, free, universally available, high quality maternal and child health services with nearly full coverage in the population ensure that all children get this attention, and that relevant measures are taken early to address potential problems discovered. Hence, this universal policy benefits all, but perhaps even more so to those children whose

parents would not have had the resources to obtain this service to its full price on the market.

Another example is child allowance. In all societies families with children have extra costs for rearing their children, compared to those who do not have children. Some families have an income which more easily can accommodate these extra costs, while others are struggling to make ends meet. In Sweden all children receive a child allowance from the government from birth until the age of 16 years (up to 19 years when studying). Again this is a universal policy which has a differentially positive impact, particularly on children who grow up in families with more limited economic resources.

Universal access to publicly subsidized, affordable child day care is valuable also for the parents, as it benefits all parents with small children and enables both the mother and the father to work and earn a living outside the home. However, this policy is particularly important and beneficial to single parents who would not be able to work and earn a living at all if they had no access to child day care.

The examples above illustrate the importance of universal policies and their differential positive impact along the social gradient. The intention of the policies is to create good living conditions for all. An intuitive reaction might be that targeted, selective policies would be more effective than universal policies. However targeted policies may have a high administrative cost, there may be threshold effects and there may be a risk of stigmatization associated with the policy.

The notion of "proportionate universalism", as proposed in the British Marmot Review, suggests to direct more resources where need is greater, but for universal interventions, in order to reduce the social gradient in health. In times of economic crisis it is especially important to maintain universal policies as those described and highlight their positive effects. Although these policies benefit all throughout the social gradient, they may be more beneficial at the lower end of the gradient.

Bo Burström, Karolinska Institutet

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Partners of the GRADIENT project (EC-GA HEALTH-F2-2009-223252)



Spotlight on the differential impact of health policies on children of different socioeconomic groups

The current issue of this newsletter deals with the differential impact of (public) health policies among children and families of different socioeconomic groups. The Gradient project held interviews with policy makers on the differential uptake and on possible success factors and barriers for an effective uptake/impact of policies to reduce inequalities in children's health and/or level up the health gradient. There are 3 levels of success factors and barriers that

ensure an effective uptake of health policies: the effect of the policy itself, the implementation process and the uptake/impact of individuals. These factors together determine whether the policy is effective in reducing health inequalities.

The interviews were carried out in the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Czech Republic.

Hawraa Al-Rufaye and Giorgio Barbareschi,
Eurohealthnet

In our next issue: Spotlight on the influence of political contexts on the health gradient

Get Involved

Call for Information has been launched – The Commission needs your input!

On Monday 20th June, the EuroHealthNet Health Equity Team launched a Call for Information, with the overall goal to collect complete overviews per EU country of relevant policy responses addressing health inequalities. In particular, we are focusing on policy responses implemented since 2005 at both national and regional level. The outcomes of this Call for Information will feed into a report that will be prepared for the European Commission. All contributions will be acknowledged.

People who wish to contribute can access the Call for Information via the health inequalities Portal (www.health-inequalities.eu). Here you can find the country overviews of relevant policy responses that have been identified so far. In case a certain policy or strategy is missing or wrongly categorized, you are able to indicate and correct this. The deadline for submission of contributions is **Monday 11th July at 12.00 pm CET**.

For further information about this Call for Information, please contact :

Claudia Marinetti (c.marinetti@eurohealthnet.eu) or Yoline Kuipers (y.kuipers@eurohealthnet.eu).

www.health-gradient.eu

Reading tips

1. **Lundberg O, et al.** *The role of welfare state principles and generosity in social policy programmes for public health: an international comparative study.* Lancet 2008; 372:1633-1640.

An investigation study on the association between family & pension policies, and infant mortality and old-age excess mortality.

2. **Burström B.** *Social differentials in the decline of infant mortality in Sweden in the 20th century: the impact of politics and policy.* International Journal Health Services 2003; 33:723-741.

The article outlines the influence and commitment of national policies in Sweden in the 20th century.

GRADIENT Publications

A literature review: Causes for differential impact of public health policies amongst children in different SES. July, 2010

Differential impact: Success factors and barriers influencing the effect of policies on the Health Gradient. April, 2011

Both publications can be found on the Gradient website: <http://www.health-gradient.eu/GRADIENT/EN/publications/>

Gradient Progress & Highlights

- A two-day joint meeting outlining possible linkages between Gradient Work Packages (WP) and the progression of the book was held at the office of EuroHealthNet in Brussels on the 21st & 22nd of June.
- The Gradient Evaluation Framework is going to be finalised soon and will be tested. Members of the GRADIENT project will pre-test the tools in their countries.
- Interviews with policy users have been conducted in Netherlands and Sweden, focusing on early school dropout; the interviews will be integrated in the report on differential impact and success factors and barriers with a focus on policy impact on users.
- Participants discussed the draft chapters of the book and next steps for the new version.
- Results of the GRADIENT project will be presented in a workshop during the next EU-PHA meeting (10-12 November 2011)

News and Events

Council conclusions: Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being

On the 17th June the Council of the European Union has published conclusions addressing child poverty and the promotion of child health and well-being. In the conclusion, the Council stresses that this issue requires a comprehensive approach and the use of adequate financial and human resources. The member states have to bear in mind that child poverty can only be tackled when also the conditions of the parents and family are addressed. Ministers are asking the European Commission to “consider child poverty and well-being a one of the priorities” of the Europe 2020 strategy. Access to education, healthcare services and social services has to be ensured together with strategies that support parents’ income and employment. The Member States are invited to combat child poverty and promote child well-being across all policies, and at all levels. One of the most important factors highlighted to combat child poverty and promote child well-being is to improve access to early childhood education and care.

To read more, visit:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu>

European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion

The European Commission organised a stakeholder dialogue on 22nd June to discuss how the European Platform Against Poverty

and Social Exclusion will function. Child poverty and well-being are key thematic areas for action in the platform. In addition, a council recommendation, setting out a number of key recommendations for action to tackle child poverty and promote child well-being, is currently in development and is planned for adoption in June 2012.

To read more, visit:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=751&langId=en>

Child Well-Being in the European Union - Better monitoring instruments for better policies

TÁRKI Social Research Institute has prepared a background paper for the Hungarian EU presidency that aims at contributing to the child mainstreaming process within the European Union through the improvement of monitoring tools in the field. An expert meeting took place on 28 April 2011, in Budapest, which brought together delegates from the European Commission, UNICEF and Eurochild, as well as representatives of the Hungarian government and of the Hungarian research community, to discuss the report. The report forms part of a process to establish a monitoring tool for tackling child and well-being at EU level.

To read more, visit:

http://www.tarki.hu/en/news/2011/items/20110531_en.html

News and Events

Literature review on Benefits of a Maternity / Parental Leave in the EU-27

The European parliament has published a literature review on the Benefits of a Maternity / Parental Leave. It describes the relevant benefits through which welfare states provide support to families to guarantee a good start in life for children, to protect children's and mothers' wellbeing and to address current demographic and economic problems and help families to achieve work/family balance.

For more information on this review, visit:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?language=en&file=40995>

Doing better for families

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has published a report on the importance of policies for families. Families are essential in population solidarity and play a major role in sustaining a healthy economy. A positive change is noticeable in life expectancy, mortality rates and the quality of life. This publication looks at the policy concerned with the change and support of families.

For more information on this book, visit:

<http://bit.ly/iDT06g>

Joint publication by the coalition for the EU Year 2012

http://eurohealthnet.eu/sites/eurohealthnet.eu/files/documents/v10_22858_AGE_solidarintergener_A5_EN.pdf

3rd EU Day of Solidarity between Generations paves the way for the European Year 2012 for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

On the 29th of April a conference, Towards the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (EY2012), was held in Brussels. This conference was concerned with the recommendations and objectives on how to realise a society for all ages and how to ensure active and healthy ageing throughout the life course

To read more, visit:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/ey2012.jsp>

Education reforms in the EU

The European Commission will publish an analytical report on the progress of Member States towards the achievement of the shared European objectives in education and training. The report will provide data and information on the performance of countries, compared

with the average level, and on how the EU education systems go about innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

For the information and to read the background report of 2009, visit:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1816&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr> & http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1951_en.htm

Strengthening Family Policies within the EU Social Policy Agenda

On the 1st of April 2011, an informal meeting of Ministers of demography and family policy issues was held in Gödöllő, Hungary. This meeting brought forward the commitment from the former Trio of Presidencies (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) of taking the family perspective into account when formulation and developing EU social policies. This commitment will continue under the current Polish Presidency. They will concentrate on the impact of family life and work on the demography. Moreover, the main priorities will be on children's rights, gender equality, and tackling poverty.

To read more, visit:

http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/PRESS/COFACE_Press_Release_1304011_Trio%20Presidency%20Legacy_EN.pdf

For the declaration of the Trio presidency:

http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/PRESS/COFACE_Trio_Declaration_EN.pdf