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ARE THE HEALTHIER WEALTHIER
OR
THE WEALTHIER HEALTHIER?

The European Evidence

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ABSTRACT: Are the healthier wealthier or the wealthier healthier? – Evidence from Europe presents an extensive and updated survey of the research findings on socio-economic inequalities in health in six European countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Netherlands and United Kingdom).

Three main questions are the focal points of this book: First, how does individual socio-economic and/or occupational status affect the physical and mental health and sense of well-being of older individuals of working age? Second, how does individual socio-economic and/or occupational status affect the ability of older workers to participate in the labour market? And third, how might policy initiatives be developed to enhance the effectiveness of welfare services for the older workforce?

The primary focus of this work is to cover all the research done so far, including unpublished papers and those written in the national language of respective country. Each chapter reviews the empirical research carried out for that country, describes the available data, comments on the adopted estimation strategies and discusses methodological limitations of the reviewed studies, hence critically assessing their reliability. The results are surveyed and interpreted within their specific institutional context in order to facilitate comparison with the international evidence published in mainstream journals and surveyed in one of the chapters. This way, the reader is able to identify the knowledge gaps in each country and to also assess what could be learned from that particular country's experience.

KEYWORDS: Socio-economic status, Health status, Labour market participation, Older workforce, Lifestyle behaviours

JEL-codes: I11, I12, I18, I31, I32

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TIIVISTELMÄ: Tämä kolmevuotiseen EU-rahoitteiseen tutkimushankkeeseen liittyvä kirja esittää laajan ja ajantasaisen katsauksen tutkimustuloksiin sosioekonomisen ja ammatillisen aseman vaikutuksista ikääntyvän työvoiman terveyseroihin kuudessa Euroopan maassa (Alankomaat, Iso-Britannia, Kreikka, Ranska, Suomi ja Tanska).

Socio-economic and occupational effects on the health inequality of the older workforce (SOCIOLD) -nimisen tutkimushankkeen pääkysymyksiä ovat yksilöllisen sosio-ekonomisen ja/tai ammatillisen aseman vaikutus ikääntyneiden työikäisten henkilöiden fyysiseen ja henkiseen terveyteen ja hyvinvoinnin tunteeseen sekä heidän sosioekonomisen asemansa ja terveytensä vaikutus työkykyyn ja täten työhön osallistumiseen. Syvempi tietämys sosioekonomisen aseman, terveyden ja työmarkkinakäyttäytymisen välisistä riippuvuuksista parantaa Euroopan ikääntyvälle työvoimalle suunnattujen hyvinvointipalvelujen parantamiseen pyrkivien politiikka-aloitteiden kehittämismahdollisuuksia.

Kirjaan on pyritty ottamaan mukaan kaikki tähänastinen tutkimus, sisältäen myös julkaisemattomat ja kunkin maan omalla kielellä kirjoitetut tutkimukset. Luvuissa käydään läpi kussakin maassa tehty empiirinen tutkimus, kuvaillaan saatavilla olevaa dataa, kommentoidaan käytettyjä estimointimenetelmiä ja käsitellään tarkasteltujen tutkimusten metodologisia rajoituksia arvioiden siten kriittisesti niiden luotettavuutta. Tuloksia tarkastellaan ja tulkitaan niiden omassa institutionaalisessa viitekehyksessä, jotta helpotettaisiin niiden vertaamista kansainväliseen tutkimukseen, jota on käyty läpi yhdessä kirjan luvuista. Tällä tavoin lukija voi tunnistaa aukot kunkin maan tiedoissa ja myös arvioida, mitä voitaisiin oppia kunkin maan kokemuksista.

AVAINSANAT: Sosio-ekonominen asema, Terveys, Työhön osallistuminen, Ikääntynyt työvoima, Elämäntapa

JEL-koodit: I11, I12, I18, I31, I32

Preface

Are the healthier wealthier? Or does the direction of causality go the other way around, implying that the wealthier tend to be healthier? These are intriguing questions of high policy relevance, not least in face of ageing European populations.

This study reviews the literature and provides an important benchmark for our current research-based knowledge on these matters. It draws together both international and national empirical research within this particular field. It also evaluates critically the available evidence from a methodological point of view. Equally important, it emphasises the policy implications that can be derived from the existing research, while at the same time pointing to remaining knowledge gaps that need to be filled with a view of offering policy makers better guidance in these matters.

The review of literature at hand is part of a three-year research project titled *Socio-economic and occupational effects on the health inequality of the older workforce – SOCIOLD* and funded by the European Commission under grant no. QLRT-2001-02292.

I wish to congratulate the project partners and, especially, the editors – Ali Skalli, Edvard Johansson and Ioannis Theodossiou – for an excellent work.

Helsinki, March 2006

Sixten Korkman

Authors' foreword

“Socio-economic and occupational effects on the health inequality of the older workforce – SOCIOLD” is a three-year EU financed research project that started on January 1, 2003. It involves six European countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The overarching objective of SOCIOLD is to study the effect of individuals' socio-economic and/or occupational status on their physical and mental health and sense of well-being, with special emphasis on older individuals of working age. It also aims at analysing the specific effects of, respectively, the socio-economic status and the health history of older workers on their ability to participate in the labour market. A better understanding of the association between socio-economic status, health status and labour market participation behaviour is, indeed, necessary for the development of policy initiatives aiming at enhanced effectiveness of the welfare services for the older workforce in an era of an ageing population in Europe. More information on the SOCIOLD project is available at the project's web-site www.abdn.ac.uk/sociold.

This volume is based on a cooperative endeavour of the researchers associated with the SOCIOLD project. It provides a comprehensive review of the international literature, as well as of the current state of knowledge in each partner country concerning the socio-economic inequalities in health in general and among older workers in particular. It thus draws a baseline for the targeted research agenda of the SOCIOLD partners. The reviews presented in this book highlight what can be learned from the research that has so far been conducted in each country. It also identifies the knowledge gaps and their potential explanations either in terms of institutional settings or in terms of data limitations and methodological difficulties.

On behalf of all partners we would like to thank DG-Research of the European Commission for providing funds (grant no QLRT-2001-02292) to carry out the SOCIOLD research project. We also want to thank the Scientific Officer at DG-Research responsible for the SOCIOLD project, Dr. Kevin McCarthy, and the External Expert, Professor Panos Tsakloglou, for their very helpful and insightful comments. We are also grateful to Rita Asplund at ETLA for her very friendly assistance in the editorial work and to Tuula Ratapalo,

also at ETLA, for her excellent work in preparing the final layout of this volume.

Paris, Helsinki and Aberdeen, March 2006

Ali Skalli, Edvard Johansson and Ioannis Theodossiou.

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