

INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HEALTH: THE GENDER DIMENSION

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Abstract

Are inequality of opportunity in health similar for men and women? In this paper, we measure separately for women and men the extent to which health inequality is due to determinants beyond individual control and to determinants within one's responsibility. We use data from the Survey on Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe that provide us with a comprehensive set of family and social background during childhood as well as a set of three health-related efforts in adulthood. We use reduced-form models to evaluate the magnitude of inequality of opportunity in health and inequality related to individual effort across gender in Europe as a whole and within countries. We find that inequality of opportunity account approximately for a third of health inequality in both gender while the share of health inequality related to efforts account for 19% for men and 22% for women. In most countries, inequalities of opportunity in adult health are mainly driven by childhood socioeconomic conditions. The within-country analyses reveal lower inequalities of opportunity in health among women than men in countries with a globally high level of inequality of opportunity while it is the opposite in countries with a low level of inequality of opportunity. Our results show a stronger link between women's health status and lifestyles than in men. This suggests higher returns of effort for women's health.

Keywords: Equality of opportunity; Europe; health; inequality decomposition; efforts; circumstances

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