

**GENDER DIFFERENCES
IN INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY
IN GENERAL, MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

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Preliminary version

Abstract

The analysis of inequality of opportunity in health is based on the partition of health inequality within two sources. Legitimate sources, which are related to individual responsibility, namely one's lifestyles and effort, and illegitimate sources, which are circumstances beyond individual responsibility, i.e. one's family and socioeconomic background. This paper aims to study the association between general health, mental health, physical health and respectively circumstances and efforts and to establish whether these differ across gender. We use data from the Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), including individuals aged 50 and older followed longitudinally between 2004 and 2017 across 9 European countries. SHARE provides retrospective data on childhood conditions as well as current health status and lifestyles. Here we focus on general, mental and physical health that we study separately for men and women. We find that the three health outcomes are significantly associated with various childhood circumstances and lifestyles, however those may differ across gender. For each health outcome, we have found a gendered intergenerational transmission of health where mothers' health is strongly associated with daughter's health outcomes and father's health with sons' health outcomes. Having a father that could harm is strongly negatively and significantly associated with the mental health of women compared with men's. Concerning lifestyles, women's general, mental and physical health are strongly correlated to alcohol consumption and fruits and vegetables intakes compared with men's general, mental and physical health. Moreover, coefficients obtained from the regressions with physical health as an outcome are weaker than the ones obtained with general and mental health. Therefore, it is important to include mental health indicators, in order to improve our understanding of inequality of opportunities in health. Finally, using comparable model specification across health outcomes, we find that we explain a larger part of the variance in general and physical health (around 25%) than in mental health (around 12%), which leads us to believe that more elements of the current socio-economic environment of the individual in adult life is needed to explain mental health.

Keywords: Inequality of opportunity ; gender ; Europe ; health ; circumstances ; effort

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