

Abstract

Health Inequality in Canada – New Data, New Approaches

Michael Wolfson (and colleagues), Statistics Canada

Health inequalities are a major concern in many countries, yet debate continues with regard to the appropriate approaches to measurement. Various approaches include cross-sectional inequality in health status (variously measured) based on survey data, regional variations in small area mortality rates and life expectancies, and socio-economic status gradients in life expectancies, usually based on small area mortality rates sorted by ecological indicators of socio-economic status. In this paper we develop a new more integrative approach, based on the concept of health-adjusted life expectancy, or HALE. HALE is usually estimated by the Sullivan method which combines a period life table with (meso-level) average health status by age and sex. But distributional analysis is only really feasible with microdata. Based on a unique new linkage of a 15% sample Canada's 1991 population census with mortality records, combined with a decade of longitudinal health status data from Canada's National Population Health Survey, this paper will estimate HALEs at the individual level for a representative sample of the Canadian population, and then use these as the basis for novel estimates of lifetime health inequality.