Educational differentials in activity limitations across the European Union

Aïda Solé-Auró

Summary

Background: Health expectancies vary across and within Europe according to socioeconomic status (SES). The lower SES usually show health disadvantage and the higher SES a health advantage compared to the average. However, the interaction with country contexts alters the magnitude of this SES-health pattern. In this study, we propose to deconstruct SES differentials to identify countries with significant difference in the health advantage of the higher SES and disadvantage of the lower SES. We refer to the welfare regimes of the countries as a framework for interpreting the findings.

Methods: We analyse EU-SILC 2009 individual dataset. Health is measured by the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI). We applied a fixed effect logistic model, pooling data from 26 European countries, in the 30-79 age group and in three age groups. The model includes age, sex and education (low, middle and high), interacted with the country. We analyze the interacted country-education variable, net of the average effect of education computed in a separate model.

Findings: We found a significant country-specific effect towards both high- and low-educated groups, changing their level of relative health advantage/disadvantage compared to the average. Some combine a reduced disadvantage for the low-educated and a reduced advantage for the high-educated, ending up with small differentials. Others combine an increased disadvantage for the low-educated with an increased advantage for the high-educated, ending up with large differentials. Patterns are not uniform across welfare regimes and change across age-groups.

Interpretation: The study confirms differentiated country effect towards the different educational groups and varied patterns across countries, explaining the variation in the SES differentials in Europe. These results are encouraging and need further exploration using a selection of macro-level variables to specify country effects. Our results support the need for approaches which deconstruct SES differentials separately for SES groups and to account for different patterns across ages.