

Research Priorities for Health Equity

– a discussion paper
commissioned by WHO



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Background and process

- WHO Task Force on research priorities to take forward the health equity agenda (2004)
- 2005-2008: Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH)
- Consultations on research priorities: Symposium on Social Determinants of Health, Rio de Janeiro, 2007; Global Forum for Health Research, 2007; Bamako Ministerial Forum on Health Research, 2008
- New WHO Task Force (2009), consisting of CSDH/KN Hub leaders, to update 2004 Task Force report on research priorities
- Further consultations: Circulation of draft report to selected stakeholders for comments; ISEqH workshop, 2009; session at the World Social Science Forum, Bergen 2009; WHO/IER seminar, 2009.

Purpose

- Stimulate further thinking, debate and refinement of strategic approaches focussing WHO support and collaborations to advance global research on equity and health

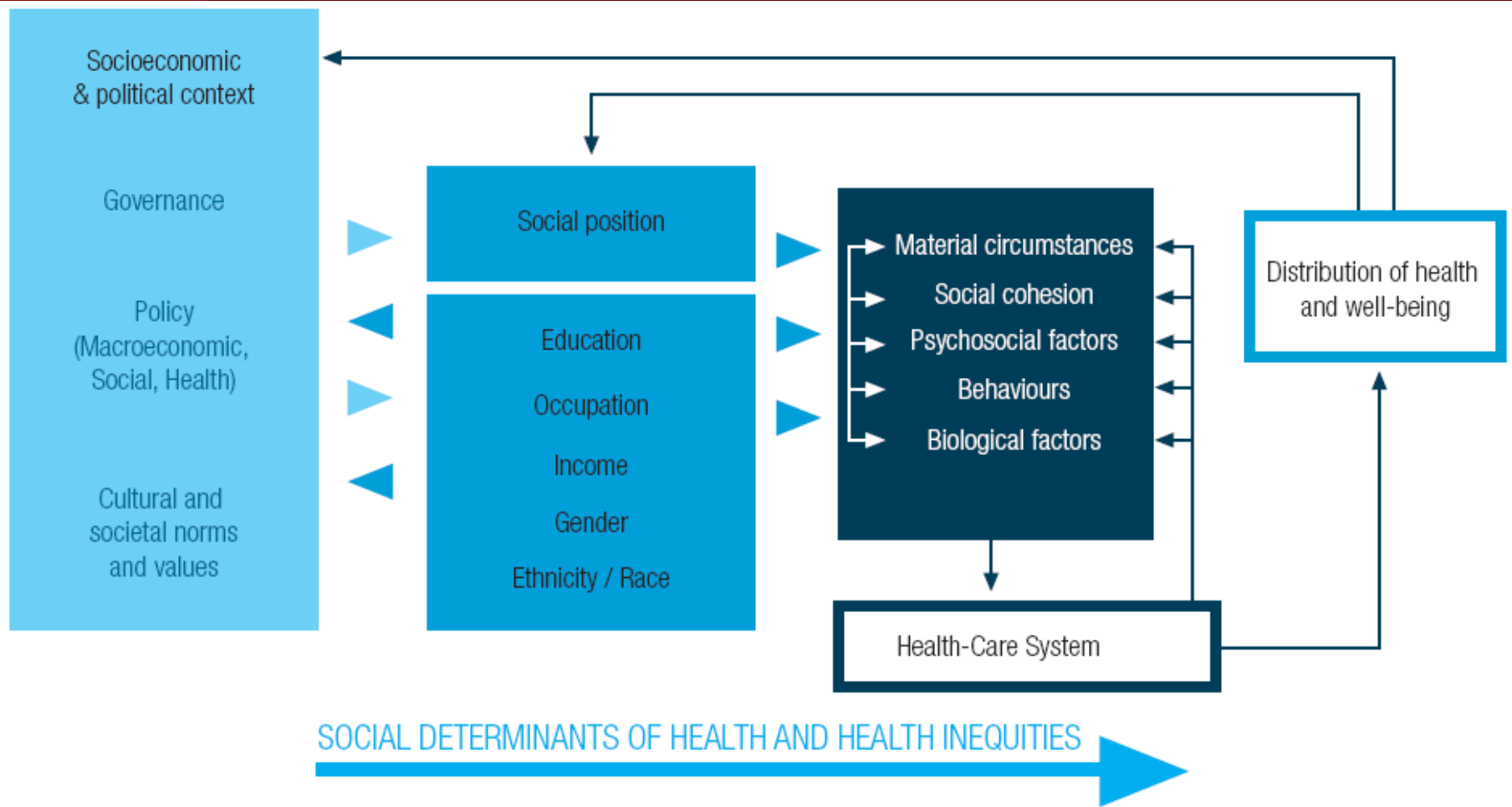
Key strategic issues for discussion

- (1) Based on recommendations and learning from the CSDH, its Knowledge Networks and other contemporary efforts, what areas of research could WHO concentrate support on to best advance greater health equity?
- (2) What aspects of research, including the development of concepts, methods, norms and standards, and synthesis approaches could best benefit from global collaboration?

Key strategic issues for discussion

- (3) How can WHO support and guide collaborations to maximise the relevance of global research on equity and health to specific countries and sub-populations?
- (4) What core strategies and innovative opportunities could increase research collaborations and the uptake of research from a wider range of stakeholders from low- and middle-income countries?

Figure 1. Conceptual framework used by the Commission on Social Determinants of Health



Need to broaden health research focus to...

- **go beyond the behavioral and other individual determinants of illness;**
- **examine the intersections among different social hierarchies and their cumulative impacts on health status and health inequities;**
- **examine the connections between different types of determinants of ill health, which are often poorly conceptualized and integrated into research;**
- **consider the dynamic nature of equity in different country contexts;**
- **describe the institutions and processes that influence the allocation of resources related to health and its social determinants;**
- **focus on how the global context affects choices about resource allocation towards and within national and sub-national levels;**
- **develop new designs, given randomized controlled trials cannot be generated to evaluate many interventions that address social determinants of health or support research to action**

Priority research areas

1. Global factors and processes that affect health equity

2. Structures and processes that differentially affect people's chances to be healthy

3. Health services and systems factors that influence health equity

4. How to influence 1-3 and identify interventions that could reduce inequities in SDH and health services



Global factors and processes that affect health equity

GLOBALIZATION

The increasing interconnectedness of countries has often not reduced economic inequalities and their effects on health, and may even have reversed past improvements in health status.


Example of research questions:

How are WTO agreements and dispute resolution outcomes affecting health and health services both directly and indirectly?

What are the implications for women's health and social protection of the "feminization" of work forces?

What are the implications for SDH of new patterns of migration that are associated with globalization?

Structures and processes that differentially affect people's chances to be healthy



The social environment, or social context, in which we live generates unequal distributions of power, wealth, risks and vulnerabilities to illness.

Example of research questions:

How can we better understand the health equity impacts of changes in tax policies, systems of social provision, labour market policies, housing policies, etc?

How will the the health risks related to global environmental change, differentially affect different socioeconomic groups, as defined both within and among countries?

Health services and systems factors that influence health equity

Health services have critical role in redressing health inequities. Evidence from CSDH indicates effectiveness of primary health care in delivering services equitably in low and middle-income countries.

Example of research questions:

What are the most effective measures at local, national and international levels for resisting and counteracting pressures to commercialise health services and commodify health care?

Within the health system, what strategies are most effective for building the institutions that sustain equity-promoting action through leadership and management initiatives?

Effective policy interventions to reduce health inequity

Example of research questions:

What is the state of current knowledge with respect to best incorporating equity within health impact assessment methodologies?

For purposes of research on socioeconomic gradients in health status, how can indicators of social position and social stratification be improved?

“Solution space”

The research agenda must place great emphasis on the design of more effective interventions and their evaluation.

Four generic directions that could increase the ability of WHO member governments to generate innovative responses

1

Building a critical mass of professionals with backgrounds relevant to SDH

2

Building networks for research support and advocacy and pursuing new research partnerships

3

Expanding resources for research related to SDH

4

Ensuring that norms and standards for monitoring and assessment of health inequities are updated and used within WHO core statistics

Discussion points

- **What are the most strategic approaches for individual countries and EU wide policies on research to take up the health equity research agenda?**
 - **Dedicated research funding linking SDH/equity not only in health, but in other sectors as well**
 - **Integrating SDH/equity approaches in other health related funding streams**
 - **Other approaches?**

Discussion points

- How can the geographic scope for the health equity research agenda be made broader?
 - Research policies for EU member states, and research programmes dedicated at institutions (including countries with no or little research traditions within health equity research)
 - Research funding/collaborations with institutions outside the EU, in particular low and middle-income countries
 - Other approaches?

Discussion points

- **What can different actors do to advance the health equity research agenda?**
 - **What can the current and next EU presidency do?**
 - **What can DG Research do?**
 - **What can individual Member State research groups/funding bodies do?**
- **What are the entry points to strengthen existing, isolated research in this area?**

Conclusion

The report of the CSDH has placed health equity on the agenda of international community in an unprecedented way, and the initial response of the research community has been heartening.

The time to advance the third wave in global health research is now!

Thank you!



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