Ung same i Sverige
Livsvillkor, självvärdering och hälsa

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ABSTRACT

Background
The Sami are the indigenous people in Scandinavia. They have a long history of discrimination, racism and conflict which has had a significant impact on Sami self-esteem and possibly also on their health, especially mental health. There are some recent studies on the mental health of reindeer herding Sami in Sweden showing a high prevalence of self reported depression and anxiety compared to other Swedes in the area. Also a moderately elevated risk of suicide amongst reindeer herding male Sami exists. Several studies on the health of young Norwegian Sami have not found any major differences between the young Sami and young Norwegians in the majority population. This is the first study on the health and living conditions of young Sami in Sweden with a special reference to mental health.

Subjects and methods
Two groups of young Sami have been approached; schoolchildren aged 13-18 years participating in special school programs for Sami children (N=121) and a national sample of young adult Sami aged 18-28 years (N= 516) with an explicit Sami identity. The schoolchildren responded to questions about wellbeing and functioning measured by a self report version of Kidscreen-52 and some questions about enculturation and experience of being badly treated because of ethnic background. The young adults responded to a questionnaire about living conditions, Sami identity, health and suicidal expressions, and about experiences of bad treatment because of ethnic background. Data were compared with data from other Swedish youngsters.

Main findings

- Being a young Sami in Sweden – Living condition, identity and life satisfaction (Paper I)
  A majority of the young adult Sami was proud of being Sami, they had a positive self perception and expressed a wish to preserve their culture. Bad treatment because of Sami background was frequent, about half of all respondents reported this experience and among reindeer herders seventy percent. The Sami experienced that they had to explain and defend the Sami culture and Sami way of living to a high degree, it become obvious that there is lack of knowledge about Sami and Sami culture among Swedes.

- The health of young Swedish Sami with special reference to mental health (Paper II)
  A majority of the young adults reported feeling healthy but close to half of the group often had worries, often forget things and often experienced lack of time for doing needed things. Women and those living alone reported more negative health. Sami with experience of bad treatment due to Sami background also reported a worse health i.e. more worries, more lack of time to do needed things and not feeling calm and relaxed.

- Health-related quality of life in Sami schoolchildren in Sweden (Paper III)
  The Sami children reported lower health-related quality of life (HRQL) compared to Swedish children in general. Girls had lower physical and psychological wellbeing than boys. Sami school children with experience of ethnicity related bad treatment reported a lower HRQL compared to those without this experience.

- Suicidal expressions in young Swedish Sami (Paper IV)
  Both young adult Sami and a reference group of young Swedes from the same geographical area (N=218) reported suicidal ideation, life weariness and death wishes to a high degree (30-50 %) but this was more common among Sami. The prevalence of suicide attempts did not, differ between Sami and other young Swedes, but subgroups of the Sami (reindeer herders and those being badly treated due to ethnicity) reported a higher degree of suicide attempts and having had plans to take own life compared to Sami without this experience.

Conclusion

The less favourable wellbeing (HRQL) of the Sami children in this study compared to Swedish children in general is worrisome and might partly be explained by experiences of ethnic related bad treatment, which can be especially troublesome in the turbulent adolescent years. The young adult Sami however seem to have a rather good or even better health compared to other young Swedes. They are proud of being Sami, have a close connection to the Sami community and strong connections to family and relatives. These are possible protective factors partly explaining the wellbeing of this group in spite of the high degree of ethnic related bad treatment reported.

Key words  indigenous people, Sami population, discrimination, mental health, suicide, schoolchildren, gender, wellbeing