



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Umeå University Medical Dissertations, New Series No 2081

Health for future

Self-rated health and social status
among adolescents

Junia Joffer

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i
Föreläsningssalen, Falu lasarett. Fredagen den 4 september 2020, kl. 09:00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Anna Sarkadi, Professor,
Institutionen för folkhälso- och vårdvetenskap/socialmedicin/CHAP,
medicinska fakulteten, Uppsala universitet, Uppsala, Sverige.

Department of Epidemiology and Global Health

Organization

Umeå University
Department of Epidemiology
and Global Health

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

21 april 2020

Author

Junia Joffer

Title

Health for future: Self-rated health and social status among adolescents

Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore self-rated health, subjective social status and smoking in adolescents.

This thesis consists of a qualitative and a quantitative study. The qualitative study was an interview study that included 58 participants in the 7th and 12th grades. The cognitive interviewing technique 'think-aloud' was employed to explore how adolescents interpret and reason when answering a question about self-rated health ('A person may feel good sometimes and bad sometimes. How do you feel most of the time?'). Additionally, factors contributing to subjective social status in school and the different strategies adolescents used for positioning were explored. Qualitative content analysis and thematic network analyzes were used to analyze the data. The quantitative study was a cohort study involving 1046 adolescents who answered questionnaires about their health in the 7th, 8th, 9th and 12th grades. Data were used to investigate predicting factors in the 7th grade for smoking in the 12th grade, as well as to examine associations between subjective social status in school, socioeconomic status and self-rated health in boys and girls in the 12th grade. Data were analyzed using chi-square tests, binary logistic regression and ordinal logistic regression analyses.

The results from the interviews showed that participants interpreted the self-rated health question in holistic terms including social, mental and physical aspects. Results from the quantitative study showed that boys rated their health higher than girls at all ages. In a multivariable analysis lower self-esteem, a less negative attitude towards smoking and ever using snus in the 7th grade were significant predictors of smoking in the 12th grade. In addition, girls had an increased risk of becoming smokers. Cross-sectional analyses in the 12th grade revealed that adolescents' self-rated health was positively associated with subjective social status in school, mood in the family and self-esteem in both girls and boys. Boys rated their subjective social status higher than girls. When exploring subjective social status in school further through interviews, status hierarchies in school were confirmed by the participants, which were strongly influenced by norms linked to gender, age, ethnicity and parental economy, but also expectations about how to look, act and interact.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that the self-rated health question 'How do you feel most of the time?' is useful for capturing a multidimensional view of health. Early efforts to strengthen adolescents' self-esteem, promote anti-smoking attitudes and avoid an early initiation of snus seem to be important components of smoking prevention in adolescence. The positive association between self-rated health and subjective social status in school indicates that the subjective social status question is a useful health-related measure of social position in adolescents. Because social desirability in the school hierarchy was defined by norms that left little room for diversity, the possible negative impact of status hierarchies on adolescents' health should to be considered. Overall, gender differences in health and social status emphasize the need for a gender-sensitive understanding of factors that impact adolescents' lives.

Key words: Adolescent, health, self-rated health, smoking, self-esteem, social status, subjective social status, gender, social norms, think-aloud interview

Language

English

ISBN

978-91-7855-245-0 print
978-91-7855-246-7 digital

ISSN

0346-6612

Number of pages

87 + 4 papers