

IUSSP Committee on Emerging Health Threats

Seminar on the Determinants of Diverging Trends in Mortality

Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany, 19-21 June, 2002

REPORT

The seminar on Determinants of Diverging Trends in Mortality is the first in a series of seminars provisionally planned by the IUSSP Committee on Emerging Health Threats. The primary focus of the seminar was on the failure of epidemiologic transition theory to explain the emergence of new and unexpected mortality trends in a number of countries and world regions. The seminar focused on mortality trends and related factors including: increasing socio-economic and regional inequalities in mortality, mortality differentials at old age, health policies and the interrelationships between the changes in environmental factors and population health.

This meeting brought together demographers, epidemiologists, sociologists, specialists of public health, and representatives of international and national agencies from more than 18 countries and from different continents. Overall 31 papers were presented at the ten sessions, on the different topics of the seminar. The introductory session concerned different aspects of health transition: the emergence of divergence in mortality trends during the last few decades and the relationships between population, health and sustainable development. Two sessions were devoted to the mortality crisis in Eastern and Central Europe. The participants discussed possible determinants of the long- and short-term mortality trends and recent upturns, stressing the evidence of the new health divide between the countries of the former USSR and Central Europe. Related issues on adequacy of health policies in responding to health crises were also examined during the special session. One session was devoted to diverging trends in health transition in the South: the Indian experience in following the general pathway of the epidemiologic transition and the recent mortality crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa were presented by the leading scholars from the respective regions.

The phenomenon of high mortality in metropolitan areas in developing countries was illustrated with examples of the mortality crisis in the urban areas in Africa. Four sessions of the seminar were devoted to aspects of socio-economic and regional mortality differences within countries. Apart from the discussions on the experience of different countries and regions based on the most recent research results, the participants stressed the importance of methodological issues in measuring socio-economic inequalities in mortality. In sum, as was noted by Vladimir Shkolnikov in his concluding remarks, the seminar attracted a range of highly interesting studies providing valuable evidence of diverging health trends and shedding some light upon their driving forces. It also demonstrated a need for further monitoring and research examining the unexpected and emerging health threats. It was decided that selected papers presented during the seminar will be edited as a book or a special issue of a demographic journal.

Domantas Jaselionis