

167 *CAN A SEPARATE PROJECT REDUCE SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES IN HEALTH - EXPERIENCES FROM THE TEROKA -PROJECT IN FINLAND*

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Finns have become healthier, and the population's life expectancy has increased. However, not all population groups have equally benefited from this trend. Socioeconomic disparities in health and health related lifestyles tend either to have persisted or grown. The life expectancy for a 35-year-old male is six years shorter among manual than upper non-manual workers. The corresponding difference in women is three years. Socioeconomic differences in mortality have increased over the past few decades and are large by international comparison. Reducing socioeconomic differences in health has been a central goal of Finnish health policy for decades, but quite little has been achieved. The most recent national programme, Health 2015, aims to narrow differences in mortality between groups with different educational backgrounds, different vocational groups and the genders by 20% by the year 2015. Health differences between population groups are influenced by a number of factors related to living conditions, working conditions, lifestyles and the functioning of the service system. It is important to include the viewpoint of health distribution in the development and evaluation of health and social welfare interventions and policies.

In Finland a major challenge for health policy is to find the means to promote health equality. The purpose of the TEROKA project (Narrowing socioeconomic health differences in Finland) is to increase awareness of potentials for narrowing health differences and the means of promoting health equality in practice. TEROKA is collating information on the reasons for and trends in socioeconomic health differences, and on means and methods of narrowing these differentials in Finland and other countries. The project is also exploring the potential for cooperating with existing programmes and policies. TEROKA is a joint project run by the National Public Health Institute, STAKES and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The aim is to set up a network of actors where ideas and experiences can be pooled to generate practical measures for narrowing health differences.

The paper will discuss experiences from the three-year TEROKA project. It concludes that there is a need to develop a coherent analysis and a special strategy focusing on the reduction of inequalities in health on the international, national and municipal level in tackling inequalities in health. Finally it discusses the role of project based activities compared to institutionalised health policy mechanisms.