

The Contribution of Behaviors to Educational Differences in Healthy and Unhealthy Life Expectancies in the U.S., 2000-2010

Mikko Myrskylä, *London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)*
Neil Mehta, *Emory University*

Health behaviors vary by educational class and different health behaviors have differential effects on healthy (HLE) and unhealthy life expectancy (ULE). We document educational differences in HLE and ULE at age 50 in the U.S. and study the contribution of obesity, smoking, and alcohol consumption to these differences using the U.S. Health and Retirement Study. Preliminary results show that higher education is strongly associated with increased HLE and decreased ULE. For example, those with less than high-school education have 5.5 years (men) and 9.2 years (women) lower HLE than those with some college. These differences are 30-50 % larger than educational differences in life expectancy. Obesity, smoking, and heavy alcohol consumption are all associated with decreased HLE but only obesity is associated with ULE. In the next stage of the analysis we decompose the educational differences in HLE and ULE to estimate the contributions from the key health behaviors.