
Epidemiology and ageing

Why a special issue on ageing, why this journal, and why now?

Gerontology is in its essence a multi-disciplinary field. This is well-illustrated by examining the table of contents of any of the major gerontology journals. In a small country such as Norway, speciality journals in gerontology do not exist. Yet, a broad and interesting range of gerontological research is taking place in the land of the midnight sun. However, this literature is scattered in various disciplinary journals, and reading across disciplines is too rare.

Thus, it is most fortunate that the Norwegian Society for Epidemiology and its official journal, the Norwegian Journal of Epidemiology, have the vision to support publication of a special issue that includes work outside the traditions of epidemiology.

It is hoped and intended that these papers will stimulate epidemiologists in Norway to think about the epidemiology of ageing in the broadest possible context. Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential if we are to solve problems and take advantages of opportunities associated with ageing. If this collection of papers stimulates even just one collaboration that would otherwise not have developed, it has served its main purpose.

Just as important, this issue is intended for distribution throughout Europe, to stimulate scholarly collaborations between Norwegian researchers and counterparts elsewhere. The problems and challenges of 'Ageing Europe' know no national or regional boundaries. European demographic trends have already changed the 'timeless' demographic pyramid into a demographic rectangle and Norway has been among the leaders in experiencing this phenomenon. Over the longer term, the dependency ratio (ratio of those in paid work to those not), dominated until now by children, will come to be dominated by older adults. The implications are not minor.

In recognition that health and ageing are coming to the top of European priorities, the European Commission will during 1999 establish a committee on ageing, and older people will continue to be a priority area for the Commission during 1999. At present the Commission, working through EuroLink Age, is undertaking a comprehensive review of health promotion effectiveness for older adults. On the larger stage, 1999 will be the International Year of Older Persons.

Norway is an important collaborator with the European community through various international agreements, and these include provisions for collaboration on research and academic projects. However, even more collaboration is possible and desirable. Dear colleagues outside of Norway: The authors of this collection of paper can all be reached by e-mail (addresses provided in the papers). Please take contact!

The order of presentation of the articles is not entirely random. There are two parts: *geriatrics* and *gerontology*, although such distinctions are not always apparent. The geriatrics group includes four epidemiological studies, three from the very productive Møre and Romsdal Prescription Study, and one from the Division of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Bergen. The final two papers in this group report health services research with implications for geriatric care in out-patient settings.

The gerontology group, seven papers in all, is eclectic indeed, and intentionally so. The first three are from NOVA, a prominent Norwegian social research centre, and span a range from qualitative to quantitative research, to theoretical analysis. These are followed by four papers dealing with important problems in gerontology: incontinence, sleep problems, memory and dementia, and loneliness in old age.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank my editorial assistant, Aslaug Beathe Lunde, without whose assistance I could not have taken on this project.

Guest editor

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