



**22 mars 2017**

**Piet Bracke**

*Educational health inequalities are among the most consistent findings in social epidemiology and health sociology: the higher educated generally fare better in terms of health and health-related outcomes.*

Most social epidemiologists consider inequalities in educational attainment as a proxy indicator of social inequality and/or take education into account as a control variable. These strategies add little to our understanding of the relevance of education for health and illness. Some take the nexus between educational attainment and health more seriously, and explore the various paths through which educational attainment can contribute to better health. On average, the better educated seem to be blessed by social competence or learned effectiveness, resilience and healthier life styles. In addition, they are capable to turn credentials into better jobs, into more financial security, and into a lower risk of unemployment. More over these capacities, opportunities, and resources often accumulate across the life span. By viewing education from a human capital perspective, these studies tend to portray education as a social characteristic of individuals. An institutional perspective on education and health tries to go one step further by superseding the aforementioned social psychological approach. It considers education not only as an individual accomplishment, but also as a core institution of contemporary, meritocratic societies. This perspective opens up a plethora of potentially interesting research questions, such as on the potential health impact of the expansion of tertiary education; on education and social class reproduction; on gendered educational health inequalities and the reversed gender gap in education; and on education, healthy life styles, preventive care in the fourth stage of the epidemiological transition.

With these examples of research topics, we hope to illustrate how an institutional approach contributes to the development of a macrosociology of health & illness.

### **Biography**

Piet Bracke is a full professor at the Department of Sociology at Ghent University (Belgium) and an invited professor at LIVES (University of Geneva) this semester. His current research interests include sociology of the family and sociological epidemiology. He has conducted research in various fields, like mental health and health education.

<http://www.ugent.be/ps/sociologie/nl/onderzoek/hedera/research-staff>

### **Discutant**

Dario Spini, NCCR LIVES, Faculté des sciences sociales et politiques, Université de Lausanne