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Socioeconomic differences in use of medical care and antibiotics among schoolchildren in Sweden.

<https://arctichealth.org/en/permalink/ahliterature31949>

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Source: Eur J Public Health. 2001 Sep;11(3):280-3

Date: Sep-2001

Language: English

Publication Type: Article

Keywords: Adolescent
Anti-Bacterial Agents - economics - therapeutic use
Child
Community Health Services - economics - utilization
Cross-Sectional Studies
Drug Utilization - economics
Female
Humans
Logistic Models
Male
Socioeconomic Factors
Sweden

Abstract: BACKGROUND: Studies of mortality among children and adults in Sweden have demonstrated considerable socioeconomic differences. This paper describes socioeconomic patterns of physical morbidity and use of medical care and antibiotics in schoolchildren in Sweden. METHODS: A cross-sectional study based on parent interviews from the Swedish Survey of Living Conditions in 1996-1997 was used. The study population consisted of 3,557 children aged 6-15 years. RESULTS: Forty-five percent of the schoolchildren in the study were reported to have been absent from school because of illness at least once during the previous three months, 8% were taking regular medication and 10% had ever suffered from a chronic disorder. There were no indications of socioeconomic differences according to the education of the responding parent in morbidity or use of consultations with a physician. However, children in families where the responding parents had primary education only consumed antibiotics less often (OR 0.7 and CI: 0.5-0.9) when compared to children in families with post-secondary education. Children in rural areas used consultations with a physician less often and consumed less antibiotics (adjusted OR 0.7 and CI: 0.4-0.9 and 0.7 and CI: 0.5-0.9 respectively). CONCLUSION: No obvious patterns of socioeconomic inequality in physical morbidity or use of medical care were identified among schoolchildren in Sweden. Further studies are needed in order to explain the social inequality in consumption of antibiotics among schoolchildren in Sweden and to describe social and regional patterns of psychiatric, behavioural and psychosomatic morbidity.

PubMed ID: 11582607 [View in PubMed](#) 