

# Educational components of national longevity advances in Nordic countries

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## Abstract

In the second half of the 20th century, the advances in human longevity observed have been accompanied by an increase in mortality disparities within and between countries. Education is considered as one of the strongest predictors of life expectancy. Empirical evidence suggests that both relative and absolute mortality differences by education within countries have been increasing, even in the most developed and egalitarian countries. It has been shown that these differentials remain pronounced also at older ages. The results based on high quality register-based data for Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Switzerland suggests that notable longevity advantages of high education at age 65 persists despite substantial compositional changes (a transformation of high education group from a small selective to large widely accessible group). Importantly, during the last four decades longevity increases among the highly educated people at age 65 were systematic (linear) and (in most cases) did not show any signs of slow-down. This is despite that high education groups have been displaying substantially higher life expectancy than best-practice (record) life expectancy at the country level. This evidence provides new perspectives on human longevity and inspire further discussion about the possibilities for extending human life expectancy under the current macroscopic conditions at the national level. Using a demographer's perspective, the paper identifies main methodological challenges related to monitoring and interpreting educational disparities at old age.