

Discussant remarks for Bütikofer, Karadakic, & Salvanes

Laura Wherry
NYU Wagner and NBER

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Summary

- Document changes in mortality income gradients in Norway from 1970-2017
 - By age: 1-4, 5-19, 20-49
 - Use both aggregate (municipality) and individual-level income
- Investigate timing in relation to intro and expansion of Norwegian welfare state
- Main findings:
 - Mortality at all ages decreases substantially over time
 - Mortality higher for males and gradients more pronounced
 - Mortality inequality reduced for all groups, eliminated for children
 - Municipality gradients disappear earlier than individual-income gradients

Why this paper and results are important

- Documents strong improvements in health and equality across incomes, which contrast with some patterns observed in other high-income countries
- Provides opportunity to better understand contribution of policy, particularly the role of the extensive Norwegian welfare state (universal health care, public health interventions, etc.)
- **Amazing data** - sheds light on potential differences between gradients with aggregate and individual-level income - what we can learn from both

Relationship to welfare state

- Appears that flattening of gradients starts earlier at younger ages
 - After 1970 for ages 1-4, 1980 for ages 5-19, pattern less clear for ages 20-49
- Does this mean that earlier exposures are most important?
- Explicitly map out when gradients change for each age group and how/whether the timing corresponds to early life (or later) exposure to welfare state
- Next planned analyses by cause of death seem particularly promising!

Differences in results for individual and aggregate analyses

In interpreting these differences, it would be helpful to know more about:

- How much variation is there in average income (or poverty) across municipalities and how does this change over time?
- Is the distribution of individual income within municipalities similar?
- How different is the reference period for income?
 - Parental income at ages 35-37 might be similar to contemporaneous income at ages 1-4 or 5-19, but less so for ages 20-49
 - If we think early life income or exposure to welfare state is important, and/or if there is mobility within Norway, parental income measure seems potentially more informative
- Any reverse causality concern for parental income measure?

Closing thoughts

- Really important work documenting important changes in mortality in Norway
- Looking forward to learning more from this research team!