

Health Inequalities and National Security

Prof Saroj Jayasinghe, Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

Abstract

Health inequalities (HIs) are defined as variations or disparities that are observed in health outcomes in population groups (e.g. variation in mortality rates, or of frequency of diseases between population groups such as rural vs. urban, lower income earners vs. high income earners). The paper explores whether HIs are related to measures of insecurity in a country (i.e. the inverse of national security). A framework is presented that demonstrates direct and indirect relationships between HIs and insecurities in a country. These relationships are based on three hypotheses: (a) Social inequalities (e.g. inequalities in income) promote HIs; (b) HIs lead to insecurities (e.g. loss of trust, crime rates); and (c) Social inequalities lead to insecurities. In this framework, the direct pathway is (b), while that indirect pathway is (a)→(b). Evidence is presented to support each of these hypotheses. In order to promote national security, states ought to consider policies that will narrow health and social inequalities. This could include a number of social and public policies: narrow income inequalities; invest in facilities that are pro-poor, provide social support to poorer and vulnerable groups; develop more inclusive policies, and promote empowerment of disadvantaged groups.