

Theme: 05 - Inequality in health and specific patient groups

Oral presentation

Social inequality in awareness and beliefs about cancer in the Danish population

Line Hvidberg, Cand.Scient.San.Publ, PhD fellow¹, Anette Fischer Pedersen, Postdoc, Psychologist, PhD¹, Christian Wulff, PhD, MD², and Peter Vedsted, Professor, MD, PhD¹.

¹The Research Centre for Cancer Diagnosis in Primary Care (CaP)/ The Research Unit for General Practice in Aarhus, Department of Public Health, Aarhus University, Denmark.

²Department of Oncology, Aarhus University Hospital, Denmark.

Background and aim: Survival rates vary much between patients with the same type of cancer, and for most cancers people with lower socio-economic position have poorer outcomes than their socioeconomically more affluent counterparts. Differences in awareness and beliefs about cancer between individuals may explain variations in healthcare seeking behaviour and ultimately also variations in cancer survival. The aim was to assess awareness of cancer symptoms and beliefs about cancer in a Danish population sample and to analyse the association with socio-economic position indicators.

Method: A population-based telephone survey was carried out among 3,000 randomly sampled persons aged 30 years and older using the Awareness and Beliefs about Cancer measure. Information on socio-economic position was obtained by data linkage through Statistics Denmark. Prevalence ratios were used to determine the association between socio-economic position and awareness and beliefs about cancer.

Results: A strong socio-economic gradient in cancer awareness was found. People with a low educational level and a low household income were more likely to have a lower awareness of cancer symptoms. Having a low educational level and a low household income were also strongly associated with having negative beliefs about cancer.

Conclusions: Awareness and beliefs about cancer was associated with socio-economic position. Consideration must be given to tackle inequalities in awareness and beliefs about cancer. It is important that the intended recipient groups are targeted in order not to unintentionally increase the social inequality.