Strategy for Section of Social Medicine, 2019 - 2023

RESEARCH

Social medicine is a core discipline within public health. At the Section of Social Medicine, we investigate life course social, psychosocial, psychological, physiological and behavioural determinants of health and function, as well as the socioeconomic consequences of disease and functional decline, with a focus on social inequality.

We address current societal challenges such as: social consequences of ill health, health problems in socially vulnerable population groups and neighbourhoods, functional limitations and multimorbidity in the ageing population, health consequences of psychosocial stressors in the working environment and private life, inequity in the use of health services and rehabilitation and consequences of infertility and fertility treatment. Further, we develop and employ a wide variety of epidemiological, psychometric, demographic and qualitative methods in population and patient based cohort studies and in intervention studies. Data sources include comprehensive surveys, clinical and register data, qualitative research interviews and fieldwork, as well as high resolution mobile phone derived data.

Complex interventions based on detailed knowledge about target populations and their needs are executed to develop co-created solutions to important societal challenges. Furthermore, the Section conducts evaluations of the implementation and outcomes of these interventions using a multi-method research approach. The Section quantifies and compares the expected health consequences of major policy initiatives and interventions, including the clinical perspective.

Our research is organized in four groups who collaborate on the departmental research themes both within the section and with other sections at the department. Thus:

- Based on high data complexity, using register data and surveys on social inequality in health and ageing, we will continue to collaborate nationally with actors in the private and public sector, including public health research environments.
  Within the Nordic collaborative project 'Social Inequalities in Aging' (SIA) (NordForsk) we will continue to explore social inequality in aging, retirement and use of health care services with researchers from Norway, Finland, Sweden and Iceland.
  We collaborate in the THRIVE project with University of Liverpool, Karolinska Institutet and Institute of Occupational Health in Canada. Also, we have an on-going collaboration on the Danish Working Hour Database with the National Research Center for the Working Environment; Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, Aarhus University; Danish Cancer Society; Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, Finland; Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; Statens Arbeidmiljøinstitutt, Oslo, Norway; and University of Bergen, Norway. Parts of the project are financed by NordForsk in a project
on Working hours and Wellbeing. In a project on mechanisms behind social inequality in Ischaemic Heart Disease in several generations we collaborate with Technical University of Denmark, the Danish Cancer Society/Aarhus University, Nordsjællands Hospital and the Sections of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Department of Public Health, University of Copenhagen. In a project on social inequality in cardiac rehabilitation (Hjertensglad) we collaborate with University College Copenhagen.

- We will further develop the Public Health Database (Folkesundhedsdatabasen), a unique data infrastructure linking information from public health registers and surveys. The database was established in collaboration with Statistics Denmark in 2014 and facilitates access for researchers at Department of Public Health.

- We will continue the cross departmental collaboration in the field of intervention research, developing and evaluating complex interventions within public health areas. These include reproductive health; the working environment; the use of health care services and prevention and rehabilitation initiatives that target socially vulnerable population groups and neighbourhoods. Examples are the project “Health, Well-being and Social Relations in a Changing Neighbourhood: a longitudinal, multi-methods study of the consequences of large structural changes in a diverse social housing area” (In Danish: “Sundhed, Trivsel og Relationer i Taastrupgaard”, STRIT) running from 2018-2022 in collaboration with Section of Health Services Research. We are involved in an intervention study on stress rehabilitation with health care companies financed by Copenhagen Center for Health Technology (CACHET). MAMAAct is a national trial, headed by Section of Social Medicine, Section of Epidemiology and Danish Research Centre for Ethnicity, Migration and Health. The trial aims to reduce ethnic and social disparity in stillbirth and involves 19 maternity wards in Denmark. Also, within reproductive health we are involved in an intervention to reduce negative psychosocial impact of pregnancy loss. (The COMPI Research Programme collaborates with the Unit of Medical Psychology, Section of Environmental Health at the Department and with the Fertility Clinic, Rigshospitalet).

- We have established a collaboration between the Section and “Nationalt Videnscenter for Hovedpine” and The National Research Centre for the Working Environment.
In projects on stress, occupational exposures and dementia, we collaborate with The National Dementia Research Center, Center for Healthy Aging, and The National Research Centre for the Working Environment.

We will continue our cross departmental collaboration on sustainability in global health. This includes our overall focus on social inequality, and consolidation of our ongoing international research collaboration on social inequality and ethnicity in reproductive health (COMPI Research Programme) and the international research on fertility treatment. Within environmental health we will continue our engagement in the collaboration with the Municipality of Copenhagen on air pollution.

We will continue our cross Departmental and cross faculty collaborations on aging in Center for Healthy Aging with a focus on retirement and social inequality in aging in a life course perspective.

Within life course analysis we will continue a wide range of national, Nordic and international research projects on different phases over the life course: infertility and pregnancy loss; midlife working and socioeconomic conditions; socioeconomic differences in functional status among middle-aged and older people and the determinants for social inequality in ageing and functional limitations. We will also engage in cross Departmental collaboration on methodological issues on how to take into account changes in exposures as well as potential confounders in establishing estimates across the life course.

We will continue to recruit a high number of PhD-students and postdocs and will contribute to a cross Departmental mentor programme for young research talents and a programme for facilitating and promoting international exchange. We will contribute to an attractive research environment with the possibility to continue and develop promising research areas and to initiate new research fields.

We will prioritize recruiting research talents within the field of clinical social medicine for to teach at the medical program and contribute to medical practice.

EDUCATION

The Section of Social Medicine is responsible for pre- and postgraduate level courses at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences on the following study programs:

- Bachelor and MSc in Medicine
- Bachelor and MSc in Public Health Science
- Master in Public Health
- PhD program in Public Health Science and Epidemiology
In the coming years we will continue to:

- Facilitate closer interactions between students and academic staff in the Section by inviting students to work on our research projects in their master and bachelor theses and during internships. Also, we will announce seminars and meetings for the students to join in scientific discussions and debates and contribute to the development of more frequent digital communication with the students, e.g. in Absalon. Furthermore, we will invite students to join in peer teaching on selected topics.

- We will contribute to focused evaluations and research in the area of e-learning by collaborating with COBL on how to optimize the use of e-learning to motivate the students. Our use of e-learning and digital platforms will continuously be discussed in the Section in order to balance the work load with the advantages of the technology.

- We will continue our ongoing collaboration with external stakeholders to strengthen student opportunities in practice-oriented internships. Also, we will encourage external lecturers to present relevant cases and projects to attract students and employees. This is already done in several courses. E.g. in the course “Disease prevention and health promotion” at the bachelor program in Public Health Science we invite external lecturers from the National Board of Health and from NGOs, such as the AIDS foundation, who inspire students with examples of workplaces where candidates work.

COLLABORATION AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

Our research identifies potential action points for organized societal efforts to reduce social inequalities in health and functional decline.

In the coming years:

- We will continuously contribute to the development of health promotion, prevention and rehabilitation research nationally and internationally and strengthen our ongoing collaboration with distinguished international research environments, Danish municipalities, regions and stakeholders (private and NGO’s) to increase the societal impact of our research findings. In the research project on pension age and health we are working with representatives from the organizations (employers and employees). Furthermore, we work with the Department of Odontontology to analyze social inequality in oral health.

- By producing and disseminating new case studies in neighbourhoods and municipalities we will strengthen our outreach and societal impact, focusing on the social inequality in health and in the use of health services. In the SIA project we are interviewing nurses in the
municipality of Copenhagen and at hospitals in the region who are working with discharge of socially vulnerable patients from hospital and rehabilitation centers to own home. In the MAMAACT project, focusing on reducing ethnic and social disparity in stillbirth, we collaborate with the National maternity wards, the civil society organization, ‘Bydelsmødre’, the Danish Committee for Health Education and the immigrant medical clinics at Odense and Hvidovre Hospitals.

- In order to develop our competencies within communication and use of public media we will prioritize cross Departmental training in communication.

- We will continue our fruitful collaboration with stakeholders in the development of the educational programmes MSc in Public Health; MSc in Medicine; Master of Public Health and programmes at postgraduate levels. The Section will also continue its engagement in the medical curriculum regarding practical clinical social medicine.

We have a continuing collaboration with:

- Section of Epidemiology on a Nordic collaboration project on social inequality in multimorbidity, (Well life)

- CHEP on the project: Equity and the socioeconomic impact of disease management programs in Denmark (EQUIP). The purpose of this research project is to evaluate the impact of complex Disease Management Programs (DMPs) in Denmark, and to improve existing health economic assessment methods by incorporating equity concerns.

- European register research collaboration project anchored at Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam (LIFEPATH).

Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR) in Rostock on demography and ageing.

The COMPI Research Programme, including the Unit of Medical Psychology, Section of Environmental Health; the Fertility Clinic, Rigshospitalet; Porto University, Portugal; Malmø and Lund University, Sweden.

ORGANISATION AND EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Section of Social Medicine includes academic and administrative staff and guests as well as student assistants and students, working on BA-and MA-theses and in internships. We prioritize an open, nonhierarchical and friendly working environment to promote and stimulate inspiration and academic achievements. The importance of balancing work and private/family life is explicitly emphasized by the head of section.
The Section is organized in four research groups who discuss projects, applications, methods etc. and who discuss the development of current as well as new courses. The development and exchange of knowledge between research and teaching groups is an important part of this.

To stimulate research and research collaboration app. 20 research seminars are held at the Section every year, with contributions from all employees as well as from external lecturers. The seminars are open, and partners and interested are invited, including colleagues and students at the Department. Furthermore, together with section of Epidemiology and section of Environment and Health, the Section hosts a new cross-sectional initiative: Seminar Series in Lifecourse and Aging.

Section meetings for all employees are held every month, debating section strategic issues as well as compliance issues with university and other policies. Reporting from section representatives in KU committees enables collaborative initiatives regarding research, teaching and administration.

The Section gives priority to participate in collaboration across sections, departments, and faculties, on both scientific, teaching and administrative issues, including strategic agencies such as study boards, academic councils etc.

Thus:

- We will continuously work on maintaining a healthy working environment by being observant on work-life balances, allocation of work tasks and transparency on expectations. This will be done through an open dialogue on a daily basis and through the annual PDRs.

- We will ensure a high level of cross-sectional information on all research projects by ongoing section meetings and seminars.

- We will contribute to cross-cutting departmental research project by contributing to the development of more cross departmental collaboration.