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The impact of economic inequalities on self-esteem and depression.

A longitudinal study from Denmark

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Economic inequalities and self-esteem

A longitudinal study from Denmark

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Background
Economic inequalities and self-esteem

Two observations:

In sociology: **'Death of social class'**, 'End of class politics'

In society at large: **Possible adverse consequences of recent welfare reforms** largely ignored → perception of economic inequalities as irrelevant

One 'soft' outcome of relative poverty would be **lower levels of self-esteem caused in part by experiences of not having access to** the same actitivies and **opportunities for consumption as that of peers**.

Aim: To **describe inequalities in self-esteem** and **examine antecedents** that has to do with economic issues

Data & Methods

Data from the birth cohort study **West Jutland Cohort Study** (VestLiv) – all **adolescents born in 1989**, living in Ringkjøbing County in april 2004 (N = 3.681)

Three rounds of data:

2004	age 14/15	n = 2.977 (81%)
2007	age 17/18	n = 2.370 (64%)
2010	age 20/21	n = 1.910 (52%)

Linked to register data on parental income, education and labour market participation (during their entire life) for both adolescents themselves and parents. These information are generated from the years inbetween the three data rounds, i.e parental and personal income (2002-2003 used as variable for 2004 data, 2004-2006 used for 2007 data, 2007-2009 used for 2010 data).

Self reported information on:

a) **self-esteem** (6 items from Rosenbergs scale)

b) **episodes of not being able to participate in spare time activities** because of financial difficulties

Results
Inequality in self-esteem and consumption possibilities

	Self Esteem 2004	Self Esteem 2007	Self Esteem 2010	Logistic regression. Odds Ratio (95% CI) (adjusted for gender and own income)	
					Spare time activities you pay to participate in
Parents' highest educational level (2003)					
Compulsory school	18.43	18.97	19.28		1.97 (1.24-3.13)
Vocational training	18.97	19.60	19.99		1.37 (0.93-2.00)
KVU + MVU	19.20	19.72	20.38		1.11 (0.76-1.64)
College/University or equivalent	19.71	20.17	20.45	ref	1.00
Household income (2003)					
1. Tertil e(< 460.894 kr)	18.81	19.36	19.69		1.77 (1.40-2.23)
2. Tertile (460.864-600.853 kr)	18.89	19.61	19.94		1.48 (1.20-1.82)
3. Tertile (> 600.853 kr)	19.30	19.76	20.44	ref	1.00
Own social position (2007)					
Student w/o spare time job	%	19.40	%	ref	1.00
Student w spare time job	%	19.69	%		0.90 (0.71-1.13)
Apprentice	%	19.94	%		1.00 (0.71-1.41)
In ordinary employment	%	18.81	%		1.82 (1.13-2.92)
Outside labour market	%	18.20	%		2.02 (0.93-4.41)

Results

Predictors of self-esteem

Self-esteem – all years 2004-2010 (n = 4553)		OLS	Random effects	Fixed effects
Girls vs Boys		**-1.14***	**-1.15***	%
Highest parental education (2003)				
Compulsory school		Ref	Ref	%
Vocational training		**0.36***	0.28	%
KVU + MVU		**0.37***	0.29	%
College/University or equivalent		**0.63****	**0.52(*)**	%
Household income (2003) in 1000 dKr		0.0003	0.0003	%
Have a job (Yes/No)		**0.41*****	**0.32****	0.15
Parental unemployment (2002-2009)				
No unemployment		Ref	Ref	Ref
Max 21‰		0.01	0.00	0.09
21-125 ‰		-0.19	-0.20	-0.01
> 125 ‰		-0.10	-0.22	**-0.55***
Personal income (total income 2002-2009)				
Lowest quartile (< 18.111 DKR)		Ref	Ref	Ref
2. quartile (18.112-63.608 DKR)		**0.37****	**0.38*****	**0.31***
3. quartile (63.608-213.548 DKR)		**0.82*****	**0.95*****	**1.09*****
Highest quartile (> 213.548 DKR)		**1.82*****	**1.90*****	**1.89*****
Cannot afford to attend concert or similar		0.03	0.01	%
Cannot afford spare time activities you pay to participate in		**-0.41****	**-0.42****	%
Cannot afford trips with sportsclub or other voluntary associations		**-0.42*****	**-0.41****	%

*** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$, (*) = $p < 0.1$
Adjusted for daily television use, body mass index, parental divorce, weekly hours of physical exercise, bullying

Conclusions

1) **Self-esteem is distributed unequally among adolescents**: adolescents with lowest levels of personal as well as parental income also have lowest levels of self-esteem

2) Adolescents with lower income parents have more difficulties financing participating in leisure time activities

3) **Financial situation** and unemployment **have adverse consequences on adolescents' self-esteem**

4) **Self-esteem is associated with symptoms of depression** and lower probability of being employed