IN THIS ECLECTIC ISSUE, WE ASK WHETHER INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIC SOCIETY IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH AND TACKLE THE VEXED ISSUE OF TERMS RELATING TO ETHNICITY AND RACE

Social capital has become a focus for considerable tension in recent years, as researchers attempt to understand the mediating factors between structural aspects of society and health outcomes. The related question of “is involvement in civil society groups good for your health?” is tackled this month by Ziersch and Baum, who conclude that such involvement is good for a community but not necessarily for the individual. Meanwhile, another research area that is fraught with methodological problems, the definition of terms relating to ethnicity and race, is addressed in a Glossary from Edinburgh by Raj Bhopal. He leaves us with a set of challenges for epidemiological research. And to complete a triad of social science puzzles, Ann Bowling, in an Editorial linked to a research paper by a group from the Netherlands explores the factors leading to socio-economic differentials in mortality among older people.

Our Research Reports include:

- A study of the use of a household crowding index on inter-pregnancy spacing.
- A report of the continuing fallout from the reunification of Germany, with pronounced East-West gradients of mortality from ischaemic heart disease since the unification.
- A study of the impact of maternal fish intake in late pregnancy and frequency of low birth weight and intrauterine growth retardation in a cohort of British infants. There is support for the hypothesis that raising intake during pregnancy may increase fetal growth rate, but no evidence that increasing fish consumption is associated with an increase in mean gestation.
- Findings from the British Household Panel Survey 1991-2001 that having secure employment in favourable working conditions greatly reduces the risk of healthy people developing limiting illness, and secure employment increases likelihood of recovery.
- From Belgium, findings that perceived high strain at work, especially combined with low social support, is predictive of sick leave in both sexes.
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A paper in Theory and Methods describes the faltering attempt to develop instruments that are useful in identifying victims of violence during pregnancy.

At a time when there is increasing interest in the impact of weather on public health, and the beginnings in some countries of collaborations between health departments and the meteorological offices, B C K Choi provides an original perspective on how public health practitioners can learn from the weather forecasters in the way we present information.

A miscellany in Hygieia with highlights of recent work on tuberculin skin tests, asthma, HIV and other sexually transmitted disease issues, and the ethics of health services research.
In this eclectic issue, we ask whether involvement in civic society is good for your health and tackle the vexed issue of terms relating to ethnicity and race

Carlos Alvarez-Dardet and John R Ashton

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