

## The contribution of HBSC to international child health research – a milestone in child public health

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*Like no other study in the world, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (HBSC) brings together researchers from a variety of nations from different continents. This supplement reflects one of the key strengths of the large HBSC network, namely collaboration and merging of efforts towards advancing knowledge on the social determinants of Child Public Health. For twenty-five years the HBSC study has collected data on health and health behaviour of young people across a multitude of countries, generating data useful for researchers, policy makers and health practitioners. Through standardised and regular data collection every four years, HBSC is able to internationally monitor the health status of young people and to analyse important child health trends.*

*Upon the background of a growing interest in social determinants in Child Public Health, for the first time key scientific findings from HBSC have been compiled and published within this special scientific issue of the International Journal of Public Health. Researchers from 41 different countries and different scientific backgrounds have made contributions covering a broad range of topics and issues relevant to child and adolescent health. Prominent authors in the field, including Sir Michael Marmot from the University College in London, David McQueen from the Centers of Disease Control in Atlanta, USA and Vivian Barnekow and Matt Muijen from the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen have added significance to the topic and the findings by contributing editorials to this Milestone of Child Public Health.*

*All of the papers in the supplement underwent extensive and anonymous peer-review by experts in the relevant areas. This supplement is organised into four sections. Following the editorials, overview papers provide a historical and methodo-*

*logical insight into the HBSC study. Candace Currie, the HBSC international coordinator, and colleagues, reflect in their paper on the scientific conceptualisation and management of this cross-national study in partnership with the World Health Organisation. Following this, Roberts et al. give a comprehensive insight into the methodological concepts and critically discuss the challenges associated with such a large study. The main body of the supplement contains important scientific findings in the form of thirteen original articles which are subdivided into a section focusing both health outcomes (e. g. health complaints, life satisfaction and mental well-being) and health behaviours (e. g. eating habits, physical activity, or alcohol consumption), and another section focusing the social context (e. g. peers, media and country wealth). By combining the two perspectives, namely the individual and the social context, the articles show that social determinants play a major role in child health. The results indicate that a significant number of children throughout Europe suffer from multiple health complaints and that – on an individual level – low socio-economic status is associated with health problems. An analysis of social determinants at the macro-level provides further evidence that health complaints in children increase significantly when income inequality in the country rises. These results are of high relevance, because they point out that health is multi-dimensionally determined and that solutions to emerging health problems in young people are not single-tracked. Hence, it is not sufficient to tackle the problem by following only one path, but Child Public Health must take a more global and certainly multi-faceted approach. Thus, macro-level approaches taking into account social determinants and aiming at influencing policy making are a key con-*

stituent of this. In the closing section of this supplement, Ian Young from Health Scotland highlights this aspect. By taking Scotland as an example, he shows how HBSC influences policy and practice in schools. To illustrate how learning from HBSC results can influence policy making in general – and not just in one country – Koller et al. from the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Venice, Italy reflect on the experiences of the WHO/HBSC Forum 2007 which provides a platform for facilitating the transfer between research – i. e. the collection of evidence – and practice – e. g. translating the knowledge “into action”.

Considering the importance of taking action on the social determinants of child health, this supplement shows how sci-

entific results from the HBSC study influence strategic policy development and practical health improvement programmes, thus providing an opportunity to exert positive influence on the health and well-being of young people in Europe.

As a guest editor to the *International Journal of Public Health*, I would like to thank all the authors and the journal editors for their important contributions and their help in producing this supplement. A tremendous amount of work and joint effort has been put into this. I am very happy to now present the final product of these efforts, and I wish the readers coming from many different disciplines interested in progress in *Child Public Health* an enriching and pleasurable reading!

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