STUDYING HEALTH INEQUALITIES
An applied approach

Jonathan Wistow
with
Tim Blackman, David Byrne and Gerald Wistow
# Contents

List of figures and tables  iv  
About the authors  vi  
Preface  viii  

One  Introduction  1  

**Part One: Context and theory: developing an applied approach to studying health inequalities**  
Two  Health inequalities, wicked problems and complexity  21  
Three  Health inequalities: adopting a whole system approach  49  
Four  Measuring health inequalities  71  

**Part Two: Health inequalities in England**  
Five  A history of health inequalities in England  89  
Six  Health inequalities post 2010  117  

**Part Three: Case studies**  
Seven  Evidence for public health practice: Health Inequalities  155  
National Support Team  
*Chris Bentley and Peter Counsell*  
Eight  Qualitative comparative analysis case study  183  

Nine  Conclusions  205  

Notes  217  
References  221  
Appendix A  239  
Appendix B  241  
Appendix C  245  
Index  247
List of tables and figures

Tables

2.1 Wicked and tame problems 30
2.2 Hierarchy of evidence 36
5.1 Tackling health inequalities – major departmental publications 110
6.1 Marmot Review – policy and priority objectives 138
8.1 Conditions associated with a narrowing gap in cancers mortality 190
8.2 Conditions associated with a narrowing gap in CVD mortality 191
8.3 Conditions associated with a narrowing gap for teenage conceptions ( 193
B.1 Cancers 241
B.2 CVD 242
B.3 Teenage conceptions 243
C.1 Bureaucratic conditions for cancers QCA results 245

Figures

7.1 Map of Spearhead areas 157
7.2 Different gestation times for interventions 158
7.3 Three approaches to population-level change 160
7.4 The 'Christmas tree' 163
7.5 Planning to reduce health inequalities through effective interventions – potential impact of evidence-based interventions on reducing mortality numbers 164
7.6 QOF data and 'unmanaged' and 'managed' variation in blood pressure (BP) reading 166
7.7 Rotherham prescribing costs per diabetic patient (April 2006 – March 2007) vs. percentage of diabetic patients whose HbA1C has been 7.4 or less in the last 15 months (April 2006 – March 2007) 167
7.8 South Yorkshire neighbourhood clustering 168
7.9 'The missing thousands' 169
7.10 Identifying the proportion of untreated patients 170
7.11 Logarithmic incentivisation 171
7.12 Comparison of stage of diagnosis with previous year 172
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>Wakefield classification of levels of specialist and generalist clinical skills in treating diabetes</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>Mismatch in specialist and generalist provision leading to patients falling between the gaps</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>Structured collaboration leading to raised skill levels in primary care</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>Variation in the rate of managed presentation by general practice</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the authors

**Chris Bentley.** FRCP FFPH. As a London qualified doctor, Chris migrated into population health via practice in East Africa (with Save the Children Fund and UNICEF), London, Sussex and Sheffield/South Yorkshire, where he was director of public health. He headed up the Health Inequalities National Support Team, which worked with the 70 most deprived areas of England with the poorest health (Spearhead areas), and based on this work provided ongoing policy advice to the Department of Health on population health issues. He now works independently, with contracts at local, regional and national level, and with WHO in Europe. He is a non-executive director of Derbyshire Community Healthcare NHS Trust, and is a visiting professor at Sheffield Hallam University.

**Tim Blackman** is vice-chancellor of Middlesex University London. He has held chairs in sociology and social policy at The Open University and Durham, Teesside and Oxford Brookes universities, and worked for several years as a government adviser on tackling health inequalities. He began his academic career at the University of Ulster where he undertook research on housing and health, which became a long-standing academic and policy interest.

**David Byrne** is professor of sociology and social policy in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. He has worked as an academic and in community development, and has been an inner-city municipal councillor. His interests are in the transition from industrial to post-industrial society and in the methodological programme of the social sciences, as this can be applied to understanding social issues and helping social action. He has published widely on these subjects.

**Peter Counsell.** MA MA MBA. Peter’s career as a general manager spanned the voluntary and statutory sectors in social work, healthcare and public health at local, regional and national levels. He was the cancer lead in the HINST, leading the collaborative work with National Cancer Action Team.

**Gerald Wistow** has been visiting professor in social policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science since 2004. He has previously been co-director of the Centre for Social Policy Research at Loughborough University, professor of health and social
About the authors

care management and director of the Nuffield Institute for Health at the University of Leeds, and visiting professor at the University of Durham. External roles have included appointments as a scientific adviser to the Department of Health, chair of a primary care trust and specialist adviser to the House of Commons Health Committee. He has published extensively on a wide range of health and social care issues

Jonathan Wistow is a lecturer in applied social sciences at Durham University. He has worked as a research fellow and research associate at Durham University on projects focusing on health inequalities, on health and social care systems and on climate change resilience and adaptation. Previously he worked in local government as a scrutiny support officer.