

Social inequalities in total and cause-specific mortality of a sample of the Italian population, from 1999 to 2007.

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BACKGROUND

There is extensive documentation on social inequalities in mortality across Europe, showing heterogeneity among countries. Italy contributed to this comparative research, through longitudinal systems from northern or central cities of the country. This study aims to analyse educational inequalities in general and cause-specific mortality in a sample of the Italian population.

METHODS

Study population was selected within a cohort of 123,056 individuals, followed up for mortality through record linkage with national archive of death certificates for the period 1999-2007. People aged between 25 and 74 years were selected (n = 81,763); relative risks of death by education were estimated through Poisson models, stratified according to sex and adjusted for age and geographic area of residence. Heterogeneity of risks by area of residence was evaluated.

RESULTS

Men and women with primary education or less show 79% and 63% higher mortality risks, respectively, compared with graduates. Mortality risks seem to frequently increase with decreasing education, with a significant linear trend among men. For men, social inequalities appear related to mortality due to diseases of the circulatory system and to all neoplasms, whereas for women, they are related to inequalities in cancer mortality.

CONCLUSIONS

Results from the first follow-up of a national sample highlight that Italy presents significant differences in mortality according to the socio-economic conditions of both men and women. These results not only challenge policies aimed at redistributing resources to individuals and groups, but also those policies that direct programmes and resources for treatment and prevention according to the different health needs.