Social exclusion in Finnish urban regions: area differences and effects of the social environment in the 1990's

The study looked at the prevalence and area differences in social exclusion in Finnish urban regions and aimed to find out whether characteristics of these regions had an effect on working-age individuals' risks of social exclusion in the end of the 1990's. The aims of the study where 1) to assess the prevalence of several indicators of social exclusion during the 1990’s, 2) to look at regional differences and to find out whether these differences could be explained with different regional socio-demographic population structures, 3) to find out how some characteristics of regions were associated with risks of exclusion and 4) to find out whether these associations were different among those who suffered from long-term unemployment during the economic recession of the 1990’s than among others.

Data were individual level register data, representative of the Finnish population (11% sample), linked to information on urban regions. Measures of social exclusion included long-term unemployment, living without a family, separating from the partner, low income, changing the housing tenure from owning to renting, dying, and measures combining some of the aforementioned variables. Statistical multilevel methods were used.

Those suffering from long-term unemployment during the recession were in a higher risk of social exclusion later on compared to others, and this difference was not explained by their more disadvantaged socio-economic background. Different socioeconomic population structures explained a part of the observed area differences in some outcomes while in other outcomes the area differences became more pronounced after adjusting for the population structure. The area differences thus seemed to be connected with regional characteristics other than population structures.

Measures of social environment included unemployment level, level of urbanization, voting turnout and family cohesion. Low regional level of unemployment, high level of urbanization and low levels of voting turnout and family cohesion were associated with higher risk of social exclusion in most measures. The effects of these regional social characteristics were larger on those long-term unemployed during the recession than on others. The results contribute to the knowledge on the area effects of urban regions and especially on the effects of social environments on individual well-being.