ESRC Seminar
Recession, changing economic circumstances and health: the role of research in better policy making

Eric Brunner PhD FFPH
Reader in Epidemiology and Public Health
UCL Department of Epidemiology and Public Health

Belfast, 24 March 2009
Poor social and economic circumstances affect health throughout life.

NI data, 1999-2006: life expectancy gap between most deprived areas and NI overall has improved slightly to 3.8 years in men, 2.6 years in women (DHSSPS)

Life Expectancy
Gap between most deprived areas and NI overall

- Professional
- Managerial and technical
- Skilled non-manual
- Skilled manual
- Partly skilled manual
- Unskilled manual
Social and psychological circumstances can cause long-term stress. Continuing anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem, social isolation and lack of control over work and home life, have powerful effects on health.

**Combined effects of stress and locus of control on non-fatal IHD**

INTERHEART STUDY
Rosengren et al, Lancet 2004;364:953
Important foundations of adult health are laid in early childhood

Low birth weight linked to low socioeconomic position
Social class and child cognitive development

BCS70, upper and lower quartiles of ‘Q’ by childhood SES at 22 mo
Feinstein Economica 2003
Social exclusion results from racism, discrimination, stigmatization, hostility and unemployment. Such processes prevent people from participating in education, training, gaining access to services and citizenship activities. They are socially and psychologically damaging, materially costly, and harmful to health. People who live in, or have left, institutions, such as prisons, children’s homes and psychiatric hospitals, are particularly vulnerable.

Bradshaw, 2000
Stress in the workplace increases risk of disease. People who have more control over their work have better health.

*Demand-control model*

*Effort-reward imbalance model*
Job security increases health, well-being and job satisfaction.
Higher rates of unemployment cause more illness and premature death.

Ferrie et al BMJ 2001
Friendship, good social relations and strong supportive networks improve health at home, at work and in the community.

The amount of emotional and practical social support people get varies by social and economic status.

Fig. 6. Level of social integration and mortality in five prospective studies

House et al Science 1988
Individuals turn to alcohol, drugs and tobacco and suffer from their use.

BUT

Use is influenced by the wider social setting.

Wardle et al 1999
Healthy dietary patterns are not well supported by the 'food environment'.

Low income is a risk factor for poor nutrition. In 2004 the UK LIDNS survey found 25% of men, 16% of women were deficient in vitamin C, and another 20% were in the depleted range (blood levels).
Healthy transport means less driving and more walking and cycling, backed up by better public transport.