

## Psychosocial epidemiology: methodological considerations

A long tradition exists of examining how psychosocial determinants – such as chronic stressors and aspects of social cohesion – may affect the health of humans, either directly through physiological pathways or indirectly through behavioral mechanisms. Psychosocial epidemiology investigates how interactions with the social environment impact the health of individuals. It remains to some extent a controversial research field within epidemiology. Establishing causal relations between psychosocial exposures and morbidity or mortality is not straightforward, partly due to some inherent methodological challenges.

This presentation will provide an overview of some key methodological issues in the field of psychosocial epidemiology. A lot of debate exists around attaining valid and reliable exposure assessments, since studies mainly rely on self-report measurements of psychosocial risk factors. We will also focus on challenges related to the study design, to the analytical research methods applied, and to explaining mechanisms in the relation between psychosocial exposures and health. Illustrations will be given of how different types of biases may impact research findings, and how these biases can be dealt with in epidemiological studies.