

Mortality by education among the oldest old in German speaking Switzerland, 1990-1997: results from the Swiss National Cohort

- Background:** Mortality gradients by socio-economic status have been observed in many countries. However, there is few information about general and cause-specific patterns in the oldest old (ages 80+). Knowledge of such patterns could help to provide suitable prevention programs and to identify the future need for long-term nursing facilities. Our goal is to provide solid information about the situation in Switzerland.
- Methods:** Analysed was a longitudinal data set from the Swiss National Cohort, that incorporated all deaths after the Swiss census 1990 until the end of 1997 and that was linked to data of that particular Swiss census. The study population includes all Swiss nationals aged 80 and older and living in German Switzerland, with 1.42 million person-years and 134 410 linked deaths. Educational gradients for selected causes of death (e.g. fall, diseases of the circulatory system and cancer) were analysed using Poisson and linear regression.
- Results:** Overall mortality of the elderly showed a notable educational gradient reaching out to oldest age for both sexes. Significant educational gradients were found for several causes of death. Analysis by marital status and type of household revealed different weights of the educational level.
- Conclusions:** In spite of small age-sex-cause-specific subgroups educational gradients could be identified. Even though the impact of the educational level appears to be smaller than below the age of 80 edu-

cation as a proxy of socio-economic status remains to be decisive for life expectancy among the elderly.