

Educational Disparities in Disability-Free Life Expectancy in Sweden 2002-2011

Louise Sundberg, Neda Agahi, Stefan Fors & Jonas Wastesson

Key Points

- Disability-free life expectancy increased more than total life expectancy during the period.
- A compression of disability was observed in all educational groups.
- The gap in disability-free life expectancy increased between the educational groups during the period.

Background

As the population ages there is an increasing need for studies that simultaneously assess the development of both the quantity and quality of life. Furthermore, it is well established that educational disparities exist in remaining life expectancy (LE), as well as in health during old age.

Disability-Free Life Expectancy (DFLE) has rarely been examined among older adults in the Sweden, and differences between educational groups have never been addressed previously.

Aim

The overall aim of the study is to explore disability-free life expectancy at age 77 in the Swedish population during 2002-2011. This entails:

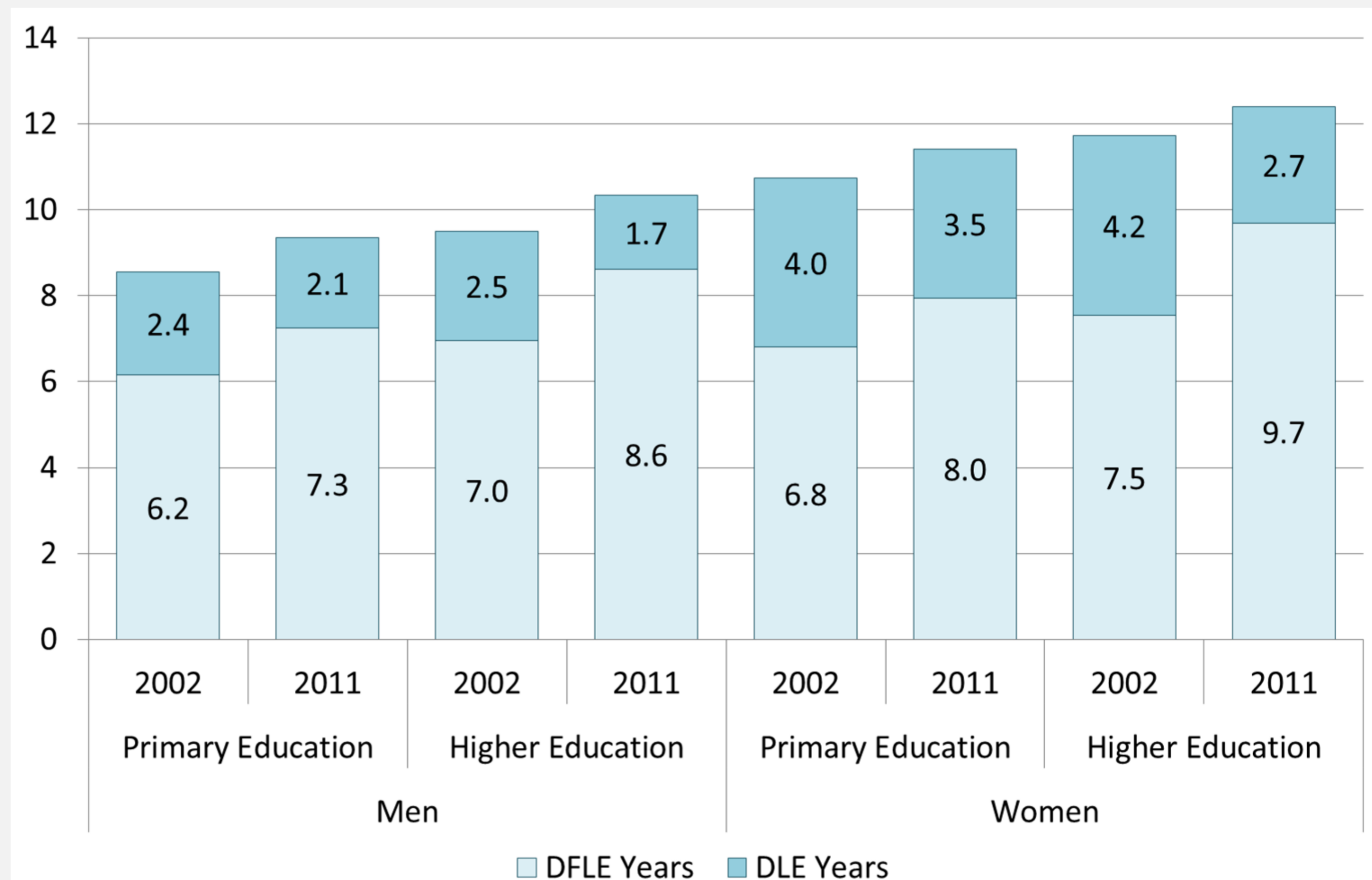
1. To explore the development of disability-free life among older adults in Sweden between 2002-2011
2. To assess the development of educational disparities in disability-free life expectancy among older adults in Sweden during the period.

Method

DFLE was calculated using the Sullivan method. LE by education was obtained from Statistics Sweden. Prevalence of ADL-disability was obtained from the Swedish Panel Study of Living Conditions of the Oldest Old (SWEOLD), a national representative sample of the Swedish population aged 77+. Disability was defined as requiring help with at least one ADL. DFLE at age 77 was calculated for year 2002 and 2011 by sex and level of education.

Study characteristics, SWEOLD

	2002		2011	
	Men n= 246	Women n= 362	Men n= 394	Women n= 495
Primary education	62%	72%	49%	62%
Higher education	38%	28%	51%	38%
ADL-disability	22%	37%	18%	26%



DFLE and DLE at age 77 in Sweden, 2002-2011, by sex and education

Results

DFLE at age 77 increased more than total LE between 2002 and 2011, indicating a compression of disability during the period. The increase was most prominent among those with higher education: 2.2 years for women and 1.6 years for men. Among those with primary education smaller increases were observed: 1.2 years for women and 1.1 years for men. Years with disability (DLE) decreased for all. However, mostly among those with higher education: 1.5 years for women and 0.8 years for men. Women with primary education had a decrease of 0.5 years, and men 0.3 years. The gap in DFLE between those with lower and higher education increased during the period, from 0.8 to 1.3 years among men, and from 0.7 to 1.7 years among women. In sum, the observed increases in both LE and DFLE suggest a overall positive development over the period. However, the increasing educational disparities should be a cause for concern.

Louise Sundberg, Aging Research Center
 Karolinska Institutet and Stockholm University
 E-mail: louise.sundberg@ki.se
 Phone: +46 8 6905862
 Gävlegatan 16 • 133 30 Stockholm • Sweden



**Karolinska
Institutet**



**Stockholm
University**