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Methodological and Theoretical Implications of the Global Health Outcomes Map

A pivotal finding in our recently completed study of global determinants of health outcomes was the global health outcomes map, indicating the distribution of life expectancy and infant and child mortality in 161 countries. Analysis of this map, which contained three clusters of countries on two slopes, revealed a wide range of methodological and theoretical issues in studies of population health outcomes. The purpose of this presentation is to describe some important methodological and theoretical issues, with examples from the global analysis at country level, in relation to theories of health outcomes.

The following issues will be included in this discussion: (a) questions about reliability and validity of databases pertain to all studies and policy decisions related to health outcomes; (b) different samples of countries yield different results; (c) explanatory models and causal analysis require rigorous designs and complex statistical procedures. Examples from the global study will be presented to illustrate these points, including discussion of groups and subclusters of countries to both support and contradict current theories of societal determinants of health outcomes.

Theories related to health outcomes should be reevaluated in light of these results. Future studies should be designed and conducted in accordance with principles of methodological and theoretical rigor.