
MEASURING AND EXPLAINING HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE INEQUALITIES IN JAMAICA: 2004-2007

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ABSTRACT

Background. Like the other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Caribbean, Jamaica grapples with improving the performance of its health system in the context of anemic economic growth over the last decade. Policies and programs aimed at improving the health status of the poor and ensuring more equitable access to health care services have had mixed results. This study addresses the need to measure and explain the inequalities and inequities of Jamaica's health system to generate evidence to support policy development, monitoring, and evaluation.

Methods. Using the nationally representative Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions datasets for 2004 and 2007, concentration curves and concentration indexes are produced for two health outcome and four health care utilization variables to measure income-related inequalities. Their standardized counterparts are used to measure inequities. Decomposition of the concentration index provides a basis for explaining the contributions of socioeconomic and demographic factors to the overall inequalities.

Findings. The analysis found that both the probability of illness and the duration of illness were concentrated among the poor, while there was a distinct pro-rich inequality in respect of the utilization of health care services. These inequalities/inequities became more pronounced over the 2004-2007 period. The level of household welfare was found to be the single most significant factor contributing to these inequalities. Other significant contributing factors were unemployment and rural location for health outcomes, and insurance coverage for utilization of services.

Interpretation. In spite of measures ostensibly taken to address health equity in Jamaica, income-related inequalities in health care have increased and the population group that needs health services more is utilizing it less. These findings suggest a need for more innovative programs geared towards equity in health in Jamaica.

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