

Exploring the relationships and pathways linking education to health, well-being and equity

Briefing



Research questions

- How does education impact on health, well-being and equity outcomes?
- What are the different mechanisms and pathways through which education and attainment influence health, well-being and equity/inequality outcomes?
- What is the nature of the evidence for the pathways?

What we did

We undertook a rapid, systematic search of literature. We carried out searches on Google Scholar, selected databases of peer reviewed literature (MEDLINE, APA PsychInfo, ERIC), grey literature websites (Education Policy Institute, Education Endowment Foundation, Health Foundation, National Foundation for Educational Research, Nuffield Foundation, OECD, WHO) and Government sources in May and June of 2022. A total of 31 papers were included in the review after eligibility screening.

Due to the nature of the review, there was no formal critical appraisal undertaken. A data extraction table was developed which included information such as methods, findings and limitations of papers.

Key findings

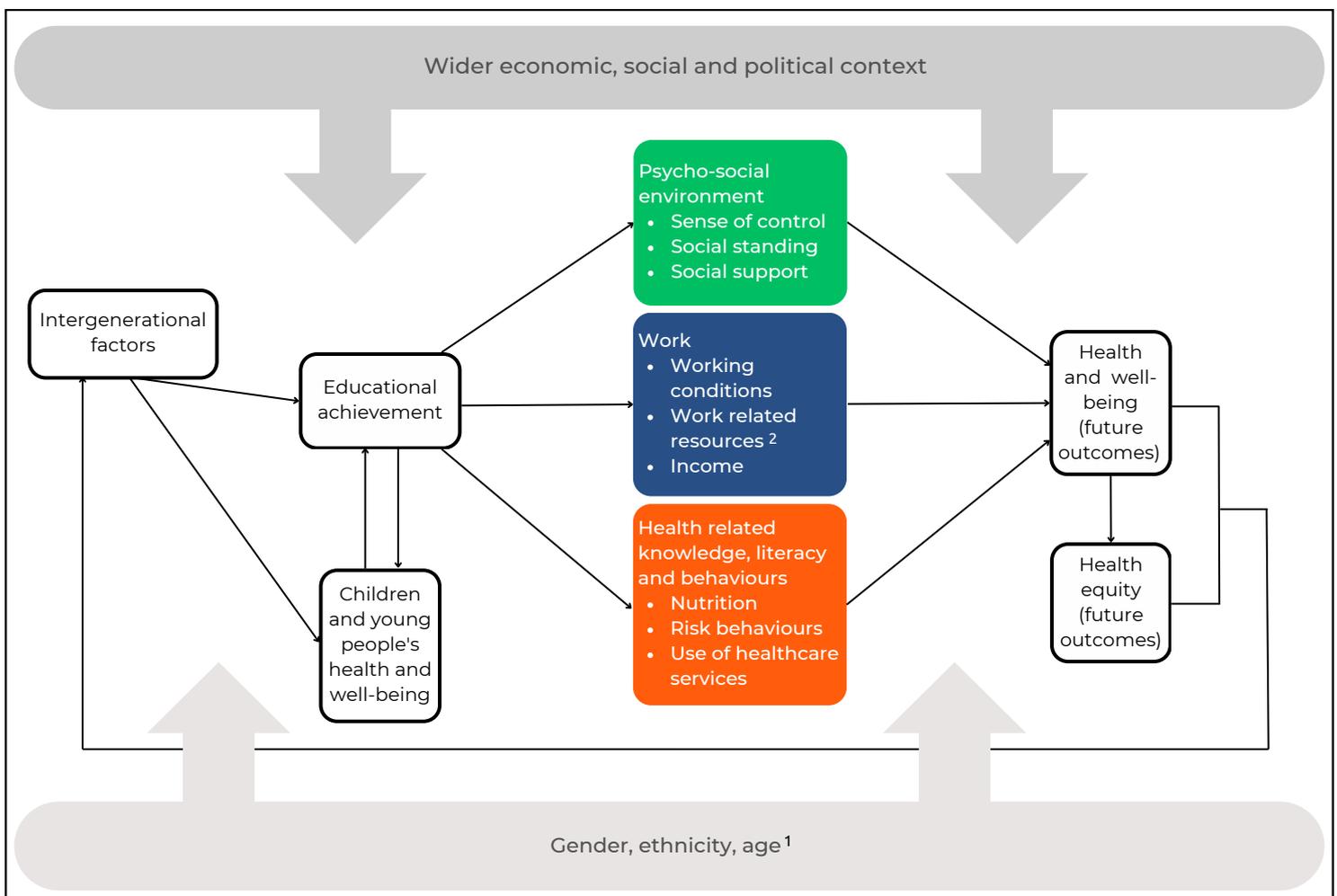
There is a strong and persistent association between education and multiple health outcomes in multiple settings, however some exceptions exist. Education affects health through complex and inter-related pathways which could not be disentangled. Papers investigate the mechanisms through which this happens and identify 3 main pathways:

- Work and income through working conditions, work related resources and income
- Psychosocial environment through sense of control, social standing and social support
- Health knowledge, literacy and behaviours

What this means

- Education can be seen as a filtering mechanism affecting all aspects of a life. Within a society it affects not only the individual, but the community and wider social policy
- Education can be a driver of opportunity but it can also perpetuate cycles of intergenerational and socioeconomic disadvantage
- The relationship between education and health depends on broader political and social context
- Education may improve health and mortality less in Europe than the US, due to the level of and access to other support and services such as health care
- Gender and ethnicity appear to have an influence on how much education affects health and these differences may be more important in lower income groups
- Future research needs to look beyond individual attainment and level of education and include wider skills and knowledge that pupils gain during their time in the education system

Figure 1: pathways from education to health (adopted from models and diagrams identified in the *Exploring the relationships and pathways linking education to health, well-being and equity* literature review)



1. Confounding and moderating factors; 2. Health insurance, sick leave, benefits