

# Principles and Basic Concepts of Equity and Health

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*"The importance of the formal results lies ultimately in their relevance to normal communication and to things that people argue about and fight for."*

*Amartya Sen (1973).  
On Economic Inequality.  
Oxford University Press. Oxford.  
Page vii.*

## 1. Introduction

In order to establish a benchmark of standards against which equity in health can be assessed, the framers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), writing fifty years ago, provided a clear guidepost, both in terms of equity in health and well-being as well as in access to medical care, stating that:<sup>2</sup>

***"Article 25. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."***

The UDHR also states:

***"Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."***

In recent decades, important authors have dedicated great efforts to studying, defining and interpreting the concept of equity and social justice, and of health equity. Three important landmarks are the works of John Rawls,<sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen,<sup>4</sup> and Margaret Whitehead.<sup>5</sup> In our own Region, various authors and public health leaders have contributed to the understanding of health equity as a public health issue,<sup>6</sup> and since 1995, the Pan American Health Organization has identified the reduction of health inequities as the main goal of its technical cooperation, under the leadership of PAHO Director, Sir George Alleyne.<sup>7,8</sup> Other leading development institutions, such

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been produced by the HDP Health Equity Interprogrammatic Group, with inputs from various other technical units in PAHO. Many of the ideas presented in this paper were part of a larger work by Alexandra Bambas, "An Interpretation of Equity in Health for Latin America and the Caribbean," (working title) which examines conceptual and programming issues for equity in health in the context of the Region.

<sup>2</sup> The full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is available at:  
<http://www.ifs.univie.ac.at/intlaw/konterm/vrkon-en/html/doku/humright.htm#1.0>

<sup>3</sup> Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>4</sup> Sen, A. (1992) *Inequality Reexamined*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>5</sup> Whitehead, M (1991) *The Concepts and Principles of Equity and Health*, WHO, EURO Report.

<sup>6</sup> These Latin American public health figures include, but are not limited to, Jaime Breilh, Juan Cesar Garcia, Asa Cristina Laurell, Cristina Possas, Mario Testa, Naomar de Almeida Filho, Pedro Luis Castellanos, Juan Samaja, Carlos Montoya, Jeannette Vega, among others.

<sup>7</sup> Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Informe Anual del Director, OSP, 1995: En Busca de la Equidad. Documento

as the Rockefeller Foundation<sup>9</sup> and the World Bank,<sup>10</sup> have also undertaken important initiatives in regard to health equity as a priority issue for human development.

The persistent prevalence of infectious diseases among the poor; the growing proportion of the burden of disease that is due to non-infectious, behavior-related causes; and the recognition of growing inter- and intra-country inequalities that have accompanied the globalization process and its worldwide expansion of free trade, market economies and liberal democracy, have given urgency to the topic of growing health disparities and to the need for national and international health authorities to address the macrodeterminants of health inequities. The issue of health inequities and their relation to living conditions is now in the mainstream of public health thinking. While the technical aspects of measuring inequalities in health have evolved, sufficient attention is not always given to explaining why disparities in health or health resources might be unfair or what the larger implications of labeling them as unfair might be. The term 'equity' is often used less than rigorously, making it unclear as to how the term should be interpreted in a particular context.

In much of the health equity discussions, reasonable claims are made that there are disparities in health status and access to care for different categories of people, whether identified by social class (as measured by income, wealth and/or formal education), spatial distribution, or ethnicity. Those who work in the public policy sector often take the further step of referring to these disparities in health as inequities, using the term casually as a shorthand for describing differences between better- and worse-off groups. Implicit to these discussions is an assumption that any difference is unacceptable and requires attention and intervention, but such discussions rarely provide an explanation for that value judgement or make distinctions between different kinds and levels of disparities.

Pronouncing these inequalities to be inequities makes a forceful claim about justice—the normative implication of the word is useful. On the other hand, confusing 'equity' for 'equality,' a common implication of comparisons between the best-off and worst-off, can result in a much higher standard than we might agree to under a more careful examination. Failure to distinguish between philosophical and pragmatic decisions regarding equity concerns in health could confuse efforts to assess the allocation of resources or other policy decisions, which would make it difficult to create sufficient transparency to generate public support.

At least three emerging empirical findings commonly drive the claim that disparities in health between socioeconomic groups should be a development issue, and specifically a public health concern, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean:

1. The poor use fewer public resources than middle and upper income groups.
2. There are large and patterned health disparities between socio-economic groups, as well as by categories of gender and ethnic origin, suggesting links between health outcomes and a variety of material and social living conditions.
3. Disparities in the impact of these macro-determinants on health and overall well being are growing.

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Official N° 277. Washington DC, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Alleyne, G.A.O. "Equity and Health," XI World Congress of Psychiatry, Hamburg, Germany, August 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Rockefeller Foundation, Global Health Equity Initiative Report, in press.

<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the current work by Davidson Gwatkin and Adam Wagstaff in the Poverty and Health Interprogrammatic Group in the World Bank is of particular importance.

These observations are often associated with the effects of globalization, and imply that intervention is required to prevent “market” distributions of resources from creating large discrepancies in health. These concerns also suggest that past intervention efforts have not sufficiently compensated for these market effects.

## 2. Definitions of equity

Dictionary definitions of “equity” are fairly consistent. The term is defined as:

<p><b>Justice according to natural law or right; specifically: freedom from bias or favoritism.</b></p> <p>--Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary</p> <p>OR</p> <p><b>The state, ideal, or quality of being just, impartial, and fair.</b></p> <p>-- American Heritage Dictionary</p>
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“Inequity,” then, is the linguistic opposite: the state, ideal, or quality of being unjust, partial, or unfair. Most importantly, notice that not *equality of distributions* but rather *fairness of distributions* is central to the definition. Although “equality” and “equity” are often conflated, the words have two distinct meanings and are conceptually very different. Equality is sameness, and equity is fairness. In any particular situation, equal may not be equitable, or equal may be precisely equitable, but we must present an ethical justification for why a certain distribution constitutes an inequity.

### **a. Vertical and horizontal equity**

Describing an equitable situation requires distinctions to be made between the appropriateness of equal and unequal distributions, or horizontal and vertical equity, either of which may constitute “even-handed treatment,” depending on the situation. Equity simultaneously requires that relevantly similar cases be treated in similar ways, and relevantly different cases be treated in different ways.

As the Dictionary of Philosophy states, controversy arises from the delineation of relevant similarity.

<p><b>Horizontal Equity:</b> the allocation of equal or equivalent resources for <i>equal need</i></p> <p><b>Vertical Equity:</b> the allocation of different resources for <i>different levels of need</i></p>
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These two conceptions of equity have dramatically different policy implications, and cannot be applied randomly to problems but must appeal to some principle or special feature of the problem that justifies the choice of one over the other. For example, a universal health care

plan might appeal to horizontal equity on the basis that *everyone* needs health care at some point. On the other hand, targeted programs for the poor would appeal to vertical equity. The distinction between these situations turns on the interpretation of *need*: in the first case, the justification is that everyone needs health care in the biological sense, while the second case appeals to a sense of financial need of the poor which doesn't apply to the non-poor.

Vertical equity has a higher potential for redistributing resources, and therefore often faces more political obstacles. However, in the current political climate, which challenges the legitimacy of public provision of services in areas thought to have market potential, vertical equity has gained momentum as a mechanism for constraining claims of need to those based on severe financial deprivation. For instance, where market mechanisms have been introduced into national health systems in the process of health sector reform, publicly funded basic packages or focalization strategies were instituted to provide for the "needs" of the worst-off. This approach has been criticized on the basis that the interpretation of need was overly narrow, leaving large segments of the population vulnerable once again. On the other hand, some focalized strategies based on vertical equity are seen as quite reasonable and successful, such as in immunization programs.

### 3. Equity in Access to Health Care Services

One operational definition of health equity focusing on need as the appropriate distribution mechanism specifically addresses equity in access to health care services. Aday's definition<sup>11</sup> is one that has pervaded thinking in the health field; we often take its claims for granted and feel it does not need defending. Aday et al. define an 'equitable distribution of health-care services' as

"one in which illness (as defined by the patient and his family or by health-care professionals) is the major determinant of the allocation of resources."

The crux of the argument is that health resources are special goods that should not be distributed strictly as normal market commodities according to economic resources because their social worth is significant.

But this service-oriented approach has been found to be insufficient in reducing disparities in health status and access to health between socioeconomic groups, a finding cited by the widely influential Black and Acheson Reports of the United Kingdom. These reports examined the British health care system, prime example of universal coverage in health, and concluded that the effect of approaching health using a medical services strategy did not address concerns of reducing health disparities and achieving fairness.

"Access to medical services" has historically been used as one measure of a fair distribution, in part because it is easier to measure and to improve access to services than to achieve more ambitious goals of, say, securing a certain level of well-being in a population, and because of the historical compartmentalization of the social sectors within government, which provided focal advantages, but may at times limit the activities seen as appropriate for any one sector.

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<sup>11</sup> Aday, L.A. and R.M. Andersen (1981). "Equity of access to Medical Care: a conceptual and empirical review." *Med Care*. Vol.19, No.12, Suppl. pp.4-27.

Additionally, there is an implicit assumption that services are a means to improving population health, an assumption that has not been sufficiently evinced.<sup>12</sup> Recent attention to inequalities in health status, especially with regard to socioeconomic categories, belies certain dissatisfaction with approaches strictly focused on access to services. This is due in part to the recognition that medical services may not be the most important determinant of health status and certainly are not the only means to improving health status. Insofar as access to services is supposed to be a means to higher level goals, such as better health, or even more opportunities in life, it is a limited measure of health equity. Various other sectors and aspects of life affect one's health status, including living conditions, working conditions, environmental issues such as air quality, education level, and access to cultural, social and political participation.

By limiting our evaluation of health equity to "access to medical services," we ignore the importance of other sectors in determining health and effectively exclude their incorporation into an equity strategy. Such an approach tends to value these services for their own sake rather than emphasizing the role of medical services as *one of many means* to health.

If our consideration of health equity is widened to include disparities in health outcomes, it becomes necessary to measure health status directly (rather than using only access to services) and to incorporate the analysis of access to other basic services, and the level of satisfaction of other basic needs, into the assessment of equity in health. The expansion from a medical services approach to a health outcomes approach involves the recognition that people do not get sick randomly, but in relation to their living, working, environmental, social, and political contexts, as well as with regard to biological and environmental factors that are unevenly distributed in the population. This broader concept is also much more conducive to considering the improvement of health status as part of the larger work of human development.

#### 4 Equity in Health Outcomes: What is fair?

The government of the United Kingdom has taken the policy position that all health differences between the best-off and worst-off in different socioeconomic groups constitute inequities in health, based on the broad concept of health equity as developed by Margaret Whitehead and adopted by EURO/WHO.

Whitehead defines **health inequities** as "***differences in health which are not only unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are considered unfair and unjust.***"<sup>13</sup>

If this were the complete definition, people with different life perspectives and even different political ideologies might be able to agree to it in principle, and hence it would be useful in the larger political forum to generate a working consensus on the matter. Nevertheless, it entails reaching agreement on two potentially controversial parameters, i.e., determining what is unnecessary and unfair *vis-à-vis* that which is inevitable and unavoidable.

Whitehead does go on to specify that there are seven determinants of health disparities that can be identified:

1. Natural, biological variation.
2. Health damaging behavior which is freely chosen, such as participation in certain sports and pastimes.

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<sup>12</sup> McKeon, Thomas. "The Role of Medicine: dream, miracle or nemesis?," Nuffield Provincial Trust, UK, 1976 (available in Spanish, "El papel de la medicina: Sueno, espejismo o nemesis," Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Whitehead, op. cit., p. 5.

3. The transient health advantage of one group over another when that group is first to adopt a health-promoting behavior (as long as others groups have the means to catch up fairly soon).
4. Health damaging behavior in which the degree of choice of lifestyles is severely restricted.
5. Exposure to unhealthy, stressful living and working conditions.
6. Inadequate access to essential health and other basic services.
7. Natural selection or health-related social mobility involving the tendency for sick people to move down the social scale).

Health disparities determined by the first three categories would not be considered unfair nor unjust, while the last four would be “considered by many to be avoidable and the resultant health differences to be unjust.”<sup>14</sup>

Although Whitehead’s definition includes adequate access to health services as a condition of justice, it extends far beyond that—and beyond the more procedural standard related to access to services—to a much broader set of conditions that can affect health and establish a health advantage of one group over another. It’s a robust concept of equity, encompassing a range of situations including outcomes, exposures, risks, living conditions, and social mobility.

## 5. Burden of Proof and Criteria of Health Equity

The burden of proof is to demonstrate that a situation is inequitable (rather than equitable) because making a social argument to change the present order requires justifying the allocation of public resources in interventions that may redress the perceived disparity. But to make this claim, we must give contextual and concrete meaning to the operational definitions of equity to determine when the judgement would apply. These meanings are reflected in recurrent criteria that are referred to in discussions on fair distributions of goods.

To establish a situation as inequitable, differences in distributions of a good, such as health resources or even the larger determinants of health status, must satisfy each of the following criteria:

- the differences in distribution must be avoidable,
- must not reflect free choice, and
- the claim must link the distribution to a responsible agent.

As the claimants, we must be able to argue how these criteria relate to particular claims of inequity.

Although these criteria might be applied to either individual distributions or to social distributions, their implications will take on somewhat different tones with each. For the purposes of policy development, we are concerned with social distributions and therefore the interpretation of each of these criteria will relate not to equity judgements of any particular person’s situation, but to trends in the health of the population and its subgroups. Some might argue that distributions are **politically** necessary—that sufficient support cannot be generated for a redistribution. But political will should be driven by justice, not constrain justice. If political will is lacking but equity criteria are present, mobilizing civil society to create political pressure becomes a technical issue.

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<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, op. cit., p. 6.

## Avoidability

'Avoidability' is a key criterion for equity, because if a distribution is not avoidable, it cannot be interpreted to be unfair in a social sense. While we may have a sense of the injustice of the universe, or of life—and even a will to intervene to change such distributions—to make a social claim based on equity is quite a different matter in that it *requires* action, while the former may simply be unfortunate.

A proposal for redistribution, whether it is of health services or of macro-determinants of health, must show the current distribution to be avoidable in several senses.

**Technically avoidable** because current scientific and organizational knowledge provides a solution for successful intervention;

**Financially avoidable** because sufficient resources do exist either within the public sector or more generally to satisfy fair conditions; and

**Morally avoidable** because the proposed redistribution would not violate some other, greater, sense of justice.

The subcategories of avoidability are highly relevant to claims of socioeconomic health inequities. Certainly there are individual cases of “technically unavoidable” health differences such as in the case of health harms linked to naturally occurring genetic variations. But unless given reason to believe the contrary, we would not expect such occurrences to be patterned according to socioeconomic groups, thereby eliminating one source of “technically unavoidable” health disparities and strengthening claims that patterned distributions of health may constitute inequities. Assuming that genetically related differences in health are not used to define our groups, the health standard of best-off groups demonstrates that those health indicators are indeed technically feasible. That is, in *technical* terms, there is no reason why all groups could not achieve health levels similar to those of best-off groups.

However, the cost of establishing standards set by best-off groups may be prohibitively expensive, at least above a certain level of health. Diminishing margins of utility certainly do not argue against *any* redistribution or investment, but may place a limit on what might be *financially* possible in reducing health disparities given resource constraints. Therefore, such studies contribute significantly to our understanding of financial avoidability, and therefore to reasonable and fair differences, even if absolute equality proves infeasible. Finally, the evaluation of financial feasibility and the effect of re-distributions cannot be restricted to current public spending levels, but must necessarily include an economic evaluation of the availability of external resources based on the potential to increase fiscal base, since the question at issue is whether the financial resources exist at a macroeconomic level, not only within the institutional confines of the health sector.

At some point, we may determine that a certain redistribution level is technically and financially feasible, but impinges on other social values to the extent that the redistribution itself becomes unjust, either by severely restricting civil liberties or by prioritizing health to the unjustifiable detriment of other social goods. Analyses must therefore include not only studies of diminishing margins of utility, but also the larger social effect of such re-distributions. Hypothetically, if we found for a particular country that we could bring disparities of IMRs, maternal mortality, and communicable diseases within “an acceptable range” by instituting tax rates of 90%, we may decide that personal freedoms have been compromised to an extent that

the social injustices created outweigh those that existed under conditions of larger health disparities. If we accomplished the task by re-allocating public spending to health by virtually eliminating other important national programs, not only might we find greater injustices than health disparities, but the actions might prove counter-productive if certain other programs (such as education or environmental protection) are affected.

If an argument that inequities exist is able to respond to each of these issues, it has succeeded in establishing that such disparities are in fact avoidable, perhaps the most difficult of the criteria to secure.

### **Choice**

Choice is most relevant to an interpretation of justice in health in relation to protecting individual autonomy. Therefore health *behaviors*, as opposed to health outcomes, better indicate possible choice issues. The application of choice as a criterion might range from an individual choosing to 1) engaging in an activity to 2) buying a product to 3) prioritizing needs. We hope that given sufficient information and opportunity, people will opt for activities and behaviors that enhance their health. Such decisions may not always be the case, though, and justification of interventions to enhance health may be limited by concerns for autonomy and preservation of civil liberties.

Free choices may, in fact, create acceptable differences between *individuals'* health, as some individuals might at times make behavioral choices that lead to worse health outcomes. But if the choice was made under perfect or even reasonably high conditions of choice, including adequate information and free will, claims of an injustice would be more difficult to sustain.

However, especially in the context of population-based analyses, protecting autonomy and promoting health are more often complimentary goals rather than competing interests. While individuals might make free choices based on their own particular wants or needs, we would not expect to see strong patterns of such behavior stratified in socioeconomic groups unless an additional correlation which explains the concentration of risky behavior were presented.

The case for socioeconomic inequities in health is built on the presumption that population *groups* would not freely choose lesser levels of health. In fact, studies have shown that health behaviors do not usually differ significantly between population groups, and when they do, such as in the case of high fat diets among some minority groups in the United States or the urban poor in Latin America and the Caribbean, culture and lack of health information can be seen to clearly diminish the role of free choice. Further, when health behaviors are controlled for income, differences between groups dissolve, and income is not usually considered a "chosen" socioeconomic category. Consequently, choice as a justification for health differences tends to fall away in population studies.

Therefore, when we do see such patterns, there is reason to believe that low levels of choice, or a thin sense of choice, might better describe those behaviors or decisions. Investigation into causality, whether through physical or social science, can bolster such an argument that choice is limited.

Opponents of redistribution sometimes try to limit the scope of challenges to choice by depending on claims of economic choices in prioritizing goods or procedural interpretations of legal entitlement (in the case of public programs), as sufficient conditions for establishing free choice. Such conclusions generally depend on assumptions of equal opportunity for individuals within a society, at least at some level, although little attention is given to elaborating on the conditions of equal opportunity or a practical demonstration that such opportunity exists. Failure of the poor to "protect their health," for instance, is due to their own negligence, or to the life situation that they have put themselves in (e.g. "choosing" to work in a dangerous factory), rather than any larger social, economic, or political disadvantages over which they had little control.



Some might argue that the poor or other vulnerable groups “choose” poor health, especially through lack of health care seeking behavior when ill. However, the priorities that intervene to prevent such utilization of care are often not only equally basic and necessary for survival but also often contribute to the family’s health in some other way, as when financial resources are used to purchase food, support the survival of the family business, or even save money to purchase plumbing.

Such arguments gain by conflating “decision making,” which can include prioritizing certain needs over other needs, with a richer meaning of “free choice.” Further, if we can demonstrate that health is strongly linked to other social sectors, the argument that the poor can “choose” to invest in health by financially prioritizing health care services over, say, housing or nutrition, loses its weight since the areas are interrelated, and that “choice” simply becomes a decision, with little real meaning in terms of improving one’s well-being.

In the case of access to health services, proponents of redistribution of resources have succeeded in expanding the narrow, but commonly used interpretation of “choice” as *a legal right to utilize resources* to include more socially embedded issues that are needed to access health resources, such as support services including transportation. Recognizing the social context of a situation demonstrates how real “choices” can be thwarted by the realities of people’s daily lives. Removal of those barriers, then, actually enhances individual autonomy in a meaningful sense, rather than detracting from it.

Transportation is only one of many barriers to free choice. While individuals often do make choices about their own health, decisions are also made by groups at the national, community, and family levels. Such situations can be used against the politically disenfranchised in a democracy to assert that all citizens have agreed to certain conditions, and therefore have “chosen” those conditions. The recognition of macrodeterminants of health, including social and economic factors that influence health status, has greatly broadened the social meaning of health resources, and consequently has expanded the list of relevant resources involved in the choice claim. Lack of access to education and access to information, for instance, can ground a health inequity claim related to choice. Though more difficult to empirically demonstrate, psychological issues are also basic to a conception of choice. Elements of social control and influence, actual and perceived locus of control, and the larger implications of certain health-related choices on one’s life become very important to identify in order to establish that choice is more limited than it might appear.

### **Agency**

The third criterion for establishing that an inequity exists is that the claim be linked to a *Responsible Agent*. For this determination, either of two meanings of “responsible” may be used. We may establish that there is a culpable entity that caused direct or indirect harms, as we might apply in the case of health harms due to environmental degradation or occupational hazards. One of the difficulties in identifying and establishing the culpable agent is that culpability can be masked. The externalization of health harms in industry or manufacturing, for instance, would first have to be recognized, then traced. In the absence of empirical studies linking problems to their sources, our ability to perceive the culpability of a particular agent will be impaired, even if there is a very direct cause/effect relationship. Further, for the purposes of socioeconomic differences in health, discrete instances of culpability are less relevant than larger systematic patterns of harms that would be generated through responses to policy, or its absence, which brings us to the second sense of “responsible.”

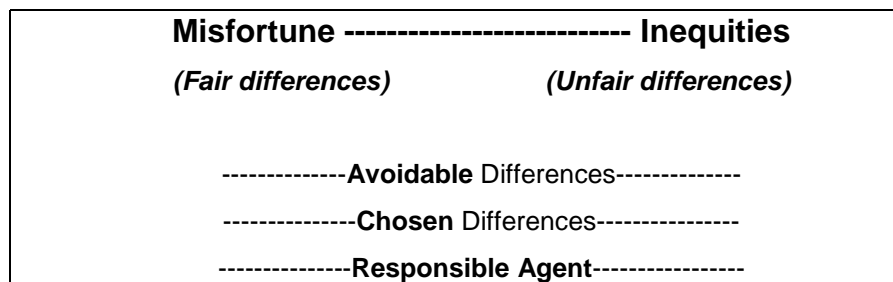
Alternatively, we might make a claim that there is an accountable entity, one that is responsible for rectifying the unfair distribution. In the case of health equity, claims often center on the responsibility of the government to ensure certain rights or provide a certain amount of protection to all citizens, which justifies state intervention. A claim of lax or unenforced government regulations, or governmental assistance in externalizing health harms, makes a

particularly strong claim. Although a government might not be responsible for creating a health-harming situation, once an issue has been publicly discussed, lack of response by government must be interpreted as a decision affecting the public to which it, as a presumably just institution, must be held accountable. The level of governance then, will also affect perceptions of the responsibility (and the ability to respond) of the government.

### The Spectrum of Disparities

If any one of these criteria is not present, or is present only in a weak way, the argument that a difference is an inequity begins to lose its power. In addition to the empirical verification that inequalities in health status or access to resources exist, scientific research can assist in demonstrating that these criteria apply, thereby greatly strengthening the political claim that inequities also exist. Because scientific knowledge is constantly growing, our interpretation of whether criteria apply to specific issues also changes over time. For instance in relation to “free choice,” alcoholism and smoking are not seen as much as lifestyle *choices* as they once were because of increasing evidence on the biological basis of addiction. Social science research also contributes to our interpretations, as when we attend to the effect of targeted advertising on alcohol consumption and smoking rates.

When we make the claim that differences in health are inequitable, the strength of the evidence or the argument, according to the above criteria, will determine the level of inequity. We might think of this as a spectrum, with each of the criteria moving our assessment of the situation either closer to “misfortune” or to “inequity.”



To be sure, we must be willing to recognize some differences as “fair” differences; otherwise, the criteria would not be meaningful. Genetic birth defects and deaths due to “old age” may be very unfortunate, but not necessarily unfair if little could have been done to prevent them, that is, they were not avoidable. Therefore, it will also be important for a clear analysis to identify those differences that do not fit into the criteria.

## 6 Conclusion

An equity driven approach in health policy making entails a wide vision of the determinants of population health. First it requires considering the broader policy action required to promote health equity. Second, the concern for equity also leads to broader policy goals to be pursued through health policy itself. Lastly, the pursuit of equity is necessarily linked to the issue

of governance and decision making procedures, and the extent to which they allow for broad representation and the effective exercise of choice by **all** social groups and members of society.<sup>15</sup>

These ideas are well summarized in the words of Sir George Alleyne<sup>16</sup>:

***“Equity refers to differences that are unnecessary or reducible and are unfair and unjust. The concept of fairness obviously involves a moral judgement and is, therefore, intrinsically difficult. As is the case with health outcomes, similarly the inequities in health determinants are those that should not exist. Every person should, in terms of equity, have the opportunity to access those sanitary and social measures necessary to protect, promote and maintain or recover health.”***

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<sup>15</sup> Gilson, Lucy. “In defence and pursuit of equity,” *Soc. Sci. Med.*, vol.47, pp. 1891-96, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Alleyne, op. cit.