

HEALTH EQUITY: MEANING, SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

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This paper is analytical and exploratory in nature. The main objective of the paper is to understand meaning of health-equity and to analyse its nature, scope and the confronting challenges. The paper is mainly based on secondary data. However, some primary observations are also included for better understanding of the issues involved.

Conceptually, equity in health care can be defined as equal access to basic package of services for equal need, where: Need refers to both the "capacity to benefit" and the "severity of illness"; and - Access refers to the barriers, mainly financial and geographical, faced by potential users. Inequality in health refers simply to differences across individuals in the population. Inequity specifically relates to differences in health that are potentially remediable. The International Society for Equity in Health defines inequity as the, "systematic and potentially remediable differences in one or more aspects of health across socially, economically, demographically or geographically defined population groups or subgroups". The underlying idea is that some inequalities are unfair or unjust. The paper also examines the WHO and other definitions of the concept.

This paper also tries to understand why health equity is so important. Health is directly constitutive of a person's well being, and it enables a person to function as an agent. In the words of Amartya Sen, "health contributes to a person's basic capability to function". Thus, inequalities in health constitute inequalities in people's capacity to function. This is a denial of equality of opportunity, as impairment to health constrains what people can do or be. Health equity, in terms of its scope, is related to issues of fairness and justice in social arrangements, including economic allocations, paying appropriate attention to the role of health in human life and freedom and the understanding of social justice. However, the concept is facing multiple challenges coming from various directions.