

WRR-Lecture 2016 Living on the edge: the growth of precariousness and why it matters for health

Introduction and concluding remarks by André Knottnerus

Introduction

Welcome to you all.

For the Scientific Council for Government Policy, the WRR, in providing scientific advice on all policy domains, one question is always central: how to serve welfare and wellbeing of all people, in local communities, nationally, and in international contexts.

Accordingly, in a time in which many people look for new societal anchors in situations of perceived uncertainty, this year's Lecture session explores precariousness, as observed in a variety of societal and policy fields. Special attention is paid to its health implications. First, because health seems to be an insufficiently recognized aspect of precariousness, and second, because health consistently belongs to the issues people care about the most. Professor Martin McKee will give us a lot more insight shortly, in a broad societal approach.

In this context, classic biomedical concepts of health, while indispensable, do not suffice. At the other hand, all too comprehensive health concepts, like the still quite popular WHO definition of 1948, are potentially medicalizing and may miss adaptive dimensions of health and opportunities for targeted policy making. We look forward to a reflection on this by Beatrijs Haverkamp, PhD scholar in philosophy at Wageningen University.

When it comes to the challenges that precariousness poses to policy making, we welcome our panel with Ingrid van Engelshoven, alderman and deputy mayor of The Hague, and Jan Anthonie Bruijn, senator and professor of medicine at Leiden University Medical Centre. While they are also politicians, we have asked them to contribute as professionals in the crafts of urban and national policy making. They will exchange views with Martin McKee, in a

discussion led by Council member Godfried Engbersen, professor of sociology. We anticipate to also have some opportunity for questions from the audience.

A bit more introduction now of our keynote lecturer Martin McKee and his really amazing oeuvre and activity.

Born in Belfast, Martin was trained in internal medicine and public health. He is Professor of European Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and founder of the European Centre on Health of Societies in Transition.

He is also Research Director of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies and President of the European Public Health Association.

He is a member of the esteemed US Institute of Medicine, holds many honorary doctorates and professorships all over the world, and was awarded various prestigious prizes such as the Donabedian International Award for outstanding contributions to healthcare.

Martin has authored numerous research papers health and health policy, with a particular focus on countries undergoing political and social transition.

Of the many books he published I just mention “Human Resources for Health in Europe” and “The contribution of health to the economy in the European Union” He also contributes a lot to the public debate, for example in the Financial Times and the Guardian, on health systems, health inequalities, and the Brexit, being a Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Noblesse oblige!

The Lancet, world leading journal in the field of medicine and health, honoured Martin McKee as champion of public health in Europe. And the British Medical Journal wrote: Martin McKee is an inescapable presence to anybody with even a fleeting interest in public health.

We did not escape from him either: for the next 45 minutes, the floor is to Martin McKee.

Concluding remarks:

This afternoon, we have learned, that

- precariousness is a huge challenge in modern societies, the Netherlands included;
- it is an important determinant of subjective and objective health outcomes;
- and also a risk factor for enhancing health inequalities, that are already quite large, also in the Netherlands.

But we have also seen that increasing precariousness and its adverse consequences are not inevitable. Policy makers and societal actors have therefore a huge responsibility to find good combinations of social security and own responsibility, and of care and autonomy; and to look for both fair and tailor-made solutions locally, nationally and internationally. And finally: there is a lot to learn, between local communities and between states, in overcoming adverse practices and striving for the better.

In this context, the Scientific Council for Government Policy will further contribute, for example in its projects on the Future of work, the pressure on the middle class, societal divisions, and socioeconomic health differences.

Thanks to you all, and especially

- o to Beatrijs Haverkamp
- o Ingrid van Engelshoven
- o Jan Anthonie Bruijn
- o Godfried Engbersen
- o and our keynote lecturer, Martin McKee