

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF AGEING POPULATIONS - CENTRE FOR CAPABILITY IN AGEING (AGECAP)

Name of main applicant: Professor Ingmar Skoog, Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology
Neuropsychiatric Epidemiology, Neuropsykiatri SU/Mölndal, Wallinsgatan 6, 431 41 Mölndal
Telephone: 0709-433 681, e-mail: ingmar.skoog@neuro.gu.se

The challenge: The number of older people increases dramatically worldwide, especially in the developing world. The population aged 65 years and above is projected to increase from 473 million in 2005 to 1457 million in 2050, and the number above age 80 from 87 million to 379 million. The largest increase will be in the developing world. This demographic challenge has important societal implications, as cognitive and physical impairments, chronic disorders and frailty increases with age. For example, it is estimated that the number of demented persons will increase world-wide from 29 million in 2010 to 135 million in 2050. Another challenge for society is that the number of retired individuals will increase, and the ratio between persons in the labor market and those who have exited will decrease. In many aspects, ageing thus represents a global challenge. In order to reach health equity and increase capability and good health, scientific efforts are needed to better understand ageing at the individual and societal level, and how to promote healthy ageing and to ensure that more people can experience a period with maintained overall function and participation in societal life and in the labor market. This requires a multidisciplinary, holistic approach

Ageing research: Given Swedish experiences of population ageing, and the active multidisciplinary ageing research at the University of Gothenburg, we argue for an expansion of the already unique opportunities to conduct cutting-edge ageing research across social, psychological, and biological aspects. Ageing research at our university was initiated in the 1960s, not at least with the still ongoing population-based H70 studies, and research focusing on dementia started already in the 1940s. A new centre for Ageing and Health, AgeCap was funded, in national competition, by Forte in 2013. The current UGOT application aims at an extension of AgeCap to further elaborate research based on the capability framework by the inclusion of additional scholars at more faculties and institutions across the university to study the global challenge of ageing.

Short description of the research and the research group

The overall aim of the extended centre is to perform coordinated studies of capability in ageing. Capability refers to the individual's ability to perform actions in order to reach goals he or she has reason to value. Our theoretical framework is that interactions among macro, meso, and individual factors form the basis for the individual capability set. The macrolevel refers to laws and regulations that affect pensions, social security, labour market, home care, and health care, and society's view on the elderly. The mesolevel refers to the context in which the daily life is embedded, e.g. socioeconomic, family life, social networks, caring facilities and obligations, health care and work. The microlevel includes individual factors, such as genetic predispositions, neurobiology, personality, somatic, mental/cognitive health, life style and human capital (e.g education, acquired work skills, earning capacity). The UGOT initiative will allow us to broaden our multidisciplinary research and educational activities by bringing together researchers from psychiatry, epidemiology, geriatrics, nutrition, ophthalmology, audiology, neurology, neurochemistry, occupational health, health care sciences, molecular biology, journalism, media and communication (JMG), historical science, Swedish language, psychology, and sociology for joint projects (JPs). Initially planned JPs will include projects focusing on ageism, political decision making in relation to ageing, secular changes, physical, cognitive and mental health, neuro-health, work and retirement, frailty, and self-determination. Researchers at the centre and their networks already have access to data bases from major population-based and clinical cohort studies. We now plan to launch new longitudinal studies of new cohorts and intervention studies that allow us to cover the entire age span from 50 to over 100 years. Knowledge gathered through the centre will have broad applications ranging from political decision-making to individual well-being. The expanded AgeCap centre will also take the important role in fostering young researchers and future research leaders in multidisciplinary aging research. The ultimate goal is to strengthen older people's capability to make choices that improve overall wellbeing and participation in society.

Two international evaluators

Gordon Wilcock, University of Oxford (gordon.wilcock@ndm.ox.ac.uk)
Diana Kuh, University College of London (d.kuh@ucl.ac.uk)