

■ Research Programme for STAKES

2006–2009

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INTRODUCTION

Finnish society has been undergoing rapid changes. Globalisation, the development of the information society, European integration, and market-driven developments have each contributed to shaping the Finnish welfare state and the social and health sector. This has impacted not only on the living conditions, values and culture of the population but also on the social and health sector steering and on the provision, structure and operation of social and health services. Key influences in the future development of the social and health sector include demographic changes, trends in public finances, technological advancement and labour market issues, with future changes expected to continue with great intensity. Another important issue in forthcoming years is the progress of an ongoing restructuring of local government and services in Finland.

There have also been upheavals in the world of research although the methods and rules for conducting research are not prone to rapid changes. The greatest changes have been witnessed in research processes and funding – which are becoming increasingly international – and also in the arrangements of research funding and in growing competition. Amidst these changes, research done at the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) has been evaluated and developed in recent years in order to ensure the highest quality of sector research.

The present research programme extending to 2009 is linked to our new overall strategy (Knowledge for Welfare and Health Strategy 2012). The intention is to target our research activities to strategically important areas. The programme presents starting points for our research, as well as research themes and lines of action for 2006 to 2009. It also specifies attempts to be made in the forthcoming years for improving the applicability of research results in decision-making and service delivery. In combination with the Research at STAKES booklet and our research web pages (www.stakes.fi), the research programme provides our co-operation partners and all those interested in research issues with basic information on the wide spectrum of research activities we pursue in social and health care.

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1 STAKES AS A RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Research at STAKES is guided by a specific parliamentary Act, targets set by both the Government and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and also by a more general social responsibility. As a sector research institute under the Ministry, STAKES engages in activities specified in the Act as follows:

The function of the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health is to monitor and assess social and health care activities and trends; produce, acquire and pass on Finnish and international information and expertise; maintain official and other statistics, databases and registers; engage in relevant research and development in the field; promote and implement relevant training; and take initiatives and make proposals for developing social and health care.

While research is at the core of our statutory function, the Act contains no specific provisions on the content of research. In addition to legislation, our activities are guided by the Government's policy definitions, its Target and Action Plan for Social Welfare and Health Care, the strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and by agreements on performance targets made annually with the Ministry.

Research conducted at STAKES serves the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and other central government agencies, political decision-makers, municipalities and joint municipal boards, associations and organisations, the research community and the media. The Science and Technology Policy Council of Finland has specified that, in addition to its own sector, each sector research institute should also serve the needs of other sectors. As the implementation of social and health policy targets is also affected by the labour, education and environment authorities, for instance, STAKES conducts research and engages in co-operation not only in the area of social and health care but also at the interfaces of various other sectors, as required.

STAKES is also an active stakeholder internationally, participating in a multitude of international research networks and producing research that also benefits national development.

Our researchers are members of a variety of specific networks and actively engage in co-operation with researchers at other sector research institutes. Close co-operation is also maintained with universities in terms of both research and education. Part of our research activities are closely associated with development work in social and health care, this type of co-operation mainly involving various municipal actors and services providers.

The Research at STAKES booklet gives an overview of our current areas of strength and research themes. At the practical level, the different areas of research have a great deal in common and co-operate closely. Our aim is to further increase research co-operation and synergy both internally and externally.

More than one third of our research is funded from sources other than the budget. Some 100 of our employees work in research tasks. We have 13 research professors and approximately one third of the researchers have a doctoral degree.

In 2004 and 2005, the researchers working for STAKES were involved in the production of some 200 books and some 1000 articles. Most of the books are Finnish publications. The same applies to articles although many of them are also published internationally. In addition to publication, the researchers are actively engaged in various expert tasks and working groups.

2 TARGETING RESEARCH AT STAKES

STAKES takes account of both the common rules for research and specific strategies

STAKES responds to various research needs by conducting applied research in particular. The highest international scientific standards are upheld in our research. The focus is on themes and issues relevant to public policy.

STAKES promotes the welfare and health of the population and develops social and health services. Our research activities are targeted in line with the strategy documents of the Government and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, as well as our own strategy and performance tools. The strategic targets of the Ministry are to promote health and functional capacity, to make work more attractive, to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and to provide efficient services and reasonable income security. STAKES' strategy specifies the following priority areas for the years to come:

- Sustainability of welfare policy
- Effectiveness of welfare and health promotion and services
- Responding to demographic changes
- Reducing social inequalities.

The overarching targets of the priority areas are to provide information as a basis for activity steering and to encourage innovativeness. As a core element of the strategy, STAKES assesses and supports welfare and health promoting policies at local and national levels.

Research policy

STAKES responds to the challenges posed by changes in research funding and the increasingly international context of research by evaluating its research activities, concentrating on its strengths, ensuring the quality of research, and networking with key co-operation partners.

STAKES seeks to be a research institute that has a key role in its areas of research nationally but also conducts high-quality research by international standards. Investment in high-quality research ensures that the information products, services and expertise produced by STAKES are sought-after and help further develop the social and health sector.

This requires that sufficient resources should be available for research. The role of external funding is becoming increasingly important not only in research funding in general but also in ensuring the quality and viability of research. STAKES actively applies for external funding, the aim being for such funding to account for at least one third of the total research funds, depending on the area of research. As the availability of research funding varies between different research areas and themes, the allocation of budget funds is an increasingly important way of targeting research and specifying priority areas.

3 RESEARCH AREAS, THEMES AND LINES OF ACTION 2006 TO 2009

Drawing on the new overall strategy, research activities at STAKES have been grouped into four areas of research for 2006 to 2009 as follows:

1. Sustainability of welfare policy
2. Social and health services and service outcomes
3. Impacts of demographic changes
4. Welfare and inequalities.

Within the first area of research, the focus is on policies with welfare and health impacts and the economic and social sustainability of policy decisions. The second research area centres on the functioning of social and health services, including service availability, effectiveness, fairness and client-orientation. The third area of research focuses on anticipating and responding to demographic changes. The fourth area of research is concerned with welfare and inequalities among the population and factors affecting them.

Currently research in all four areas draws on multiple disciplines, methods and materials. The statistics, registers and databases maintained by STAKES provide a solid basis for research. Both monitoring information and comparative analyses are needed to be able to evaluate policies and practices and their outcomes. In addition, it is necessary to participate in international research co-operation.

A number of key research themes can be identified within each area of research. A research theme typically must consist of several researchers' work, that is, a critical mass is needed. Each research theme covers a number of projects that are ongoing, agreed on or in the planning process. The research activities are partly horizontal, combining different themes around specified points of view. As a sector research institute in the area of social welfare and health care, STAKES is responsible for the continuity of diversified research activities in this area and has to be able to respond to a wide variety of information needs now and in the future.

In addition to their current research expertise, each area of research has a number of strategically important lines of action along which in-house research activities are targeted during the programme period 2006 to 2009. These lines of action have been selected – on the basis of the strategy – so as to address research areas that need more attention or new ideas and initiatives.

In the following, the research areas and the related research themes and lines of action for 2006 to 2009 will be described in more detail.

Research area 1: Sustainability of welfare policy

Welfare policy research focuses on social security, health and alcohol and drug policies, as well as issues related to the sustainability of social and health care delivery systems.

During the programme period, STAKES' specific contribution to research on the sustainability of welfare policy is to combine the economic and social perspectives. STAKES relates the general discussion on economic sustainability to the social and health sector.

RESEARCH THEMES

The social policy system and welfare policy

STAKES undertakes research on changes in the Finnish welfare state and the social impacts of welfare policy. Policies are analysed at both the national and the EU level. Research on the social security systems is concerned with changes in these systems, especially in minimum income security, and the consequences of such changes for citizens with regard, for instance, to activation and incentives.

Health policy

STAKES undertakes research on the impacts of globalisation on Finnish social and health policies. One area of interest focuses on the content, actors and processes of international health policies. Further, research is conducted on the development of the information society and its impacts on the service delivery systems in social and health care, health care professionals and citizens. Research is also carried out on ways to reduce socio-economic health inequalities and on the role of preventive services in this process.

Alcohol and drug policy systems

STAKES undertakes research on changes and trends in alcohol and drug policy systems and substance abuse prevention, and analyses the formation of systems for regulating harms related to alcohol and drugs. Research is carried out on the interrelations of the different levels of alcohol and drug policy – international, national and regional – and their impacts on substance use and harms. Other research topics include different methods of harm prevention and reduction and their outcomes. The aim is also to examine how the Finnish system compares with other countries.

Organising and financing health services

STAKES undertakes research on trends in and factors affecting health expenditure. Research is carried out on the sufficiency of funding and the different options available for financing health care in the future, taking into account the targets of equality between different population groups and geographical areas. Research into different ways of organising services is concerned with the functionality and efficiency of new methods of service delivery and their impacts on service use and population health status.

Social economy

STAKES undertakes research on trends in expenditure on social services and on the factors behind these trends, developing methods for the economic evaluation of social services. The aim is to identify ways to promote the sustainable development of service costs. In addition to the economic sustainability of service costs, the social consequences of economic decisions are analysed.

LINES OF ACTION FOR THE PROGRAMME PERIOD

During the programme period, the priority areas of research at STAKES include the costs of social and health services and income transfers and the factors affecting them, as well as the sufficiency, sustainability and allocation of funds. New service organisation models and practices are evaluated especially in terms of functionality, efficiency and welfare impacts. Further, research is carried out on health policies and health promotion policies. In addition to economic considerations, interest also focuses on the social impacts of welfare policy. Welfare policy development requires administrative-politological research approaches, as well as analysis of thematic issues.

Research area 2: Social and health services and service outcomes

Health services research at STAKES focuses on health services, health technology and service quality and outcomes. STAKES also researches the structure and outcomes of social services, targeting research particularly on services for older people and families with children. Another research topic is IT and other technology used in social and health services. STAKES conducts research where the emphasis is on overarching and cross-sectoral perspectives into the health and social service delivery system.

During the programme period, priority is given to issues related to the functionality and outcomes of service systems. Research is targeted at service availability and organisation, service forms and methods, and issues related to co-operation between service forms.

RESEARCH THEMES

Health care

STAKES undertakes research on operational and managerial practices in health care and the impacts of work-related factors on the outcomes, functionality, and quality of care and staff well-being. Health services research is concerned with how the service delivery system can encourage ageing people and people with chronic diseases to stay in work. Research topics also include the impacts and preconditions of the implementation of clinical care recommendations and service guidance. Methodology development is carried out especially in benchmarking, health-service-based trials and register use.

Methodology and technology in social and health care

The focal interest is the impact of technology on clients' and citizens' well-being and health, and the outcomes, adverse effects, cost-efficiency and social and ethical impacts of individual technologies. In analysing the impacts of technology on the structure and operation of the service delivery system, the emphasis is on service processes, service provision and professional work. STAKES also conducts research on the use, regulation and impacts of information and communication technology and technology-based processes in social and health care. In addition, the new action models and other innovations introduced in social and health care as a result of data digitalisation are evaluated and verified, while also considering the perspective of information security and confidentiality.

Mental health

This thematic area is concerned with research on mental health policy and the structure, content and outcomes of mental health services. The focal interest is the population-level welfare impacts of a comprehensive, regionally integrated mental health policy aimed at the promotion of mental health and substance-free lifestyles. STAKES also conducts research on the impacts of mental health and substance abuser services on incapacity for work, mortality from suicide and substance abuse, crime, and placements of children into care. Research is also carried out on the content, implementation and outcomes of new, diversified multiprofessional practices in mental health promotion and mental disorder prevention.

Quality and effectiveness of health services

The quality and effectiveness of health services are largely determined by how well the care chains function. Drawing on register-based data, STAKES studies the impacts of care chains on, for instance, care outcomes and the efficiency and effectiveness of health services. The aim is to identify the problems of care and nursing chains and show how information systems can be developed to support strategic service planning and allocation in a fair and effective way. In addition, comparative studies are carried out to analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of hospital care and the contributing factors in Finland and internationally.

Social service structures and outcomes evaluation

This thematic area is concerned with research on the elements of well-functioning and effective social services in terms of structures, processes, expertise and organisation. STAKES assesses the importance attached to client perspectives in social services and the possibilities to transfer good practices to other contexts. The aim is to identify factors that increase the reflectivity of social services and to assess different forms of guidance in service development and reform. Research interests include the quality and use of social services and the effectiveness of the working models and methods, information technology and interventions used in social services, as well as the preconditions for such effectiveness. In addition, research is carried out on the influence of social work organisation and work practices on successful work outcomes.

Multi-sectoral services and networks

This thematic area is concerned with research on the promotion of smooth co-operation between multiple-client services, such as psycho-social services for families with children, rehabilitation and activation services for the long-term unemployed, services for people with mental health and substance abuse problems, and elderly care. The aim is to identify ways in which the resources of specialised expert systems can be put into use in an integrated client-oriented way and to show how such integrated services are implemented in practice. In analysing rehabilitation and activation services, the aim is to assess the various steering mechanisms available to central and local government actors for organising joint services and also to examine what added value can be created by network-based service practices and structures in combating social exclusion. In psycho-social services for families with children, research is conducted on the impact of dialogical network-based working methods on clients' life, employees' activities and the service delivery system.

LINES OF ACTION FOR THE PROGRAMME PERIOD

During the programme period, research at STAKES is targeted at evaluating the availability, functioning and outcomes of social and health services. The welfare, health and economic impacts of methods and services are examined from the point of view of service users, providers, organisers and society at large. Evidence-based knowledge is produced for developing the social and health sector by evaluating the functioning and impacts of the steering mechanisms used.

Research area 3: Impacts of demographic changes

Demographic changes are approached at STAKES by analysing the situation of different age groups and how it develops. The emphasis is on services for children and families with children and policies that affect people's propensity to start a family, families' opportunities to perform their parenting duties and parents' opportunities to be gainfully employed. With the increasing number of older people, the structure of services needs to be adapted to their situation, functional capacity and service needs.

The consequences of demographic changes have mostly been assessed from the economic point of view, that is, in terms of pensions, public finances, employment and productivity. STAKES conducts research that provides information on the changing service needs of different age and population groups, the consequences of these changes for the service delivery system and the possibilities of service restructuring.

RESEARCH THEMES

Family policy and the preconditions for and barriers to starting a family

This thematic area is concerned with research on family policy and the ways in which it supports families and the starting of a family. Research is carried out on the use and distribution of different types of family leave and their consequences especially from the perspective of gender equality. Research interests include the impacts of workplace changes on family policy and on the reconciliation of work and family in the future. Research is also conducted on service needs and expectations among families and experiences of various new working methods and actions.

Well-being and ill-being among children and young people

This thematic area is concerned with research on how well-being and ill-being among children and young people develops and the factors contributing to such developments. More detailed analyses are carried out on the economic position and poverty of children and families with children and the role of family policy in determining economic welfare among families with children. Research interests include issues related to the economics of childhood, such as intergenerational relations and resource allocation. In addition, the thematic area is concerned with research on exclusion among children and the process of becoming a child welfare client.

The quality and effectiveness of services for older people

STAKES undertakes research on the structure, content, resources, quantity, quality, outcomes, efficiency, and care practices of services for older people nationally and internationally. In addition to public service provision, research is carried out on the role of informal carers, voluntary workers and the private and third sector as service providers. More generally, research is carried out on the development and future of nursing care for older people. More specifically, studies are carried out of the principles applied in assessing service needs and the impacts of quality recommendations on care and services. A special area of research is good practices in home care/home nursing and trends in supporting informal care.

LINES OF ACTION FOR THE PROGRAMME PERIOD

During the programme period, STAKES undertakes research on and anticipates the needs, use and supply of services for older people, children and families with children and the need for resources for this purpose now and in the future. In addition, research is carried out on policies affecting the position of these population groups and the policy impacts. Research is targeted at assessing different ways of organising nursing and care services in an appropriate manner and the preconditions necessary for older people to live at home. Research is carried out on the factors affecting the availability of social and health care personnel, staff retention and adequacy of professional skills.

Research area 4: Welfare and inequalities

STAKES undertakes research on living conditions, welfare and health generally, by population group and regionally. In analysing welfare policy, the focus of interest is the prevention of poverty and social deprivation and the elimination of social problems detected. Research also centres on equality issues, such as the distribution of health service use. To safeguard welfare, it is important to conduct research on alcohol and drug use and harms among the population.

RESERCH THEMES

Welfare, income distribution and living conditions

This thematic area is concerned with research on trends in welfare and living conditions among the population and differences between population groups in the distribution of welfare and living conditions. More specifically, research is carried out on trends in income distribution, in addition to which analysis is done on how income transfer decisions impact on income levels and income distribution in different population groups and related inequalities. The aim is to identify factors contributing to welfare development. In addition, the research interests include regional welfare trends and differences.

Poverty and social deprivation

STAKES undertakes research on the scope, nature and distribution of poverty and social deprivation. Research is done in order to find causes of poverty, and poverty trends are analysed nationally and compared with international trends. In the analysis of poverty, the focus is on permanent and recurring poverty and on what kind of poverty mobility exists in Finland. The aim is to address issues such as the intergenerational

nature of social deprivation and social mobility in general. In addition, the thematic area is concerned with research on the life situations of disadvantaged groups of people, with special attention given to the situation and social position of homeless and long-term unemployed people. Further, the operation of official and unofficial systems in improving the position of disadvantaged people is analysed.

Health inequalities

This thematic area is concerned with research on health policy targets and target attainment related to equality in health, as well as the reduction of health inequalities. Research is done particularly on socio-economic and regional differences in the availability, use, quality and outcomes of treatment.

Alcohol and drug use and related harms and trends

This thematic area is concerned with research on alcohol and drug use patterns and trends, the reasons behind substance use, and the meanings given to it by users. The aim is to identify harms caused to the individual and society by the use of different substances and different ways of using them. Research is also done on the distribution of harms between different groups. In analysing treatment of alcohol and drug abusers, the focus is on ways of organising treatment and possible changes in treatment systems. Research interests further include the service access of different groups of people with substance abuse problems, such as abusers of different substances and people residing in different parts of Finland.

LINES OF ACTION FOR THE PROGRAMME PERIOD

During the programme period, emphasis is given to empirical research on the trends and distribution of welfare and health in different population groups and factors affecting them. Inequality is analysed especially in terms of the availability and use of social and health services. Social deprivation is studied from various perspectives, with a focus on issues related to social mobility and the hereditary nature of social deprivation. Research is also done on alcohol and drug use and related harms. In the research on social deprivation and substance use, emphasis is given to the assessment of policies and alternative types of action.

4 UTILISING RESEARCH IN DECISION-MAKING

A more solid basis for welfare policy through information provision

One strength of STAKES is the link between its research and development activities and its own data resources. STAKES gathers information and maintains – in its role as a statistical authority – a plenitude of statistics, registers, and databases. Register data are used extensively in both data-based and theme-based research. Other strengths of STAKES include IT research and research on methodology in register-based research. Registers and statistics are also made use of across a broad spectrum of national and international research co-operation. STAKES also invests in survey data, co-ordinating and establishing regular data collection.

During the programme period, STAKES further consolidates the information basis with regard to both population welfare and the use and outcomes of services by further improving its databases and increasing online data collection. This will consolidate the basis for steering welfare policy and improve the quality of research data.

Research in support of decision-making

One of the basic functions of STAKES is to conduct social and health policy relevant research. The applicability of research results in national decision-making is assessed and ways are developed to make policy-makers aware of these results.

As a result of its research activities, STAKES has a high level of expertise on the social and health care system and services. Special emphasis is therefore given to services for municipalities and operational development so as to enable a better utilisation of this expertise in the promotion of welfare and health and the development of local and regional services.

Research forms part of innovation chains and benefits services

Innovation activities are enhanced at STAKES. This implies adequate structures to identify, assess and productise in-house innovations created through research and development. STAKES also develops action models that provide co-operation partners with integrated packages of appropriate research, development and information services. The aim is to productise in-house innovations and bring them into widespread use.

STAKES also promotes innovation structures and processes and good practices in social and health care at national and regional levels. The identification of good innovations in the field is promoted through assessment and diffusion. The aim is to promote innovativeness in the social and health sector at large.

Monitoring and evaluating the research programme

Implementing the STAKES research programme is supported through improved practices in the context of launching and monitoring research projects. Project results are evaluated in relation to project targets. Themes and lines of action for the next research programme will be specified on the basis of the implementation of the present one.