

English Abstract (Presentation language: Finnish)  
Sosiaalipolitiikan päivät 20.-21.10.2010, Helsinki  
(The annual meeting of the Social Policy Association in Finland 2010)

## **Social and material deprivation among youth in Finland: Causes, consequences, and coping.**

juha.mikkonen [at] alumni.helsinki.fi

**Background:** Social and material deprivation is associated with poor health, decreased subjective well-being, and limited opportunities for personal development, among others. This presentation outlines deprivation among low-income youth in the context of everyday life in Finland. The first aim of the presentation is to illustrate how youth with low socioeconomic status perceive the *causes* and *consequences* of their social and material deprivation. The second aim is to describe what kind of *coping strategies* youth employ to cope in their everyday life.

**Data:** The study is based on the data of 65 autobiographical essays written by Finnish youth aged 14-29 years (Larivaara, Isola & Mikkonen, 2007). Despite the extensive research on socioeconomic income disparities, only a few scholars have addressed the question of how low socioeconomic position is experienced by disadvantaged people themselves. Little is known about the everyday social processes that lead to decreased well-being of economically and socially disadvantaged citizens.

**Method:** Autobiographical narratives were analyzed based on grounded theory methodology (GTM). The qualitative data analysis was not based on any pre-conceived categorizations but was guided by so-called “sensitizing concepts”. The concepts of this study are based on the research literature on deprivation, coping, and youth resilience.

The concept of resilience refers to an individual’s capacity to cope despite existing risk factors and conditions that are harmful to health and well-being. Coping strategies can be understood as ways by which a person tries to cope with psychological stress in a situation where internal or external demands exceed one’s resources. The ways to cope are cognitive or behavioral efforts by which individual tries to relieve the stress. Lack of material and social resources is associated with increased exposure to health-related stressors during the life-course. From a transactional perspective, coping strategies aim at changing the unbalanced situation between personal resources and external demands.

**Results:** Finnish youth attributed the primary causes of deprivation to their disadvantaged family background, current socioeconomic status, and sudden life events. Material and social deprivation was associated with various kinds of negative psychological, social, and material consequences. Youth used a variety of coping strategies that were identified as either internal strategies (psychological) or external strategies (social and behavioral). In the presentation, causes, consequences, and coping strategies are outlined in more detail. The findings are furthermore compared and contrasted to the existing research on material and social deprivation

### **References**

Larivaara, M., Isola, A., & Mikkonen, J. (2007). *Arkipäivän kokemuksia köyhyydestä*. Keuruu: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Avain.