Self-rated health and subjective social status among Swedish adolescents

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Background
It is well known that a persons’ social position is closely related to health status. Social status is most often measured with socioeconomic parameters like education, income and occupation. From a youth perceptive, this implies analyzing the socioeconomic status of the parents. In recent years, it has been argued that measurements where the adolescents own position is measured, might be more important for health. Hence, the aim of the study was to investigate associations between self-rated health, subjective social status and parental educational level in adolescence.

Methods
A quantitative approach with cross sectional survey data from 705 adolescents in upper secondary school (17–18 years old) in Sweden. Self-rated health was measured by a single-item question with five response options. Subjective social status was measured by respondents rating their social position in comparison other pupils in school on a ladder with ten steps. Data on parental educational level (low, medium and high) was collected from Statistics Sweden, the official national statistical database. Associations were analyzed with Mann-Whitney U-test and Chi-square test.

Results
Self-rated health was strongly associated with subjective social status in school, both among boys (p-value <0.001) and girls (p-value <0.001). The proportion of adolescents with 'very good' self-rated health increased with each higher step on the subjective social status ladder. There was no statistical significant association between self-rated health and parental educational level, or between subjective social status and parental educational level.

Conclusions
In this cohort, subjective social status was closely associated to adolescents’ self-rated health. The concept of subjective social status needs to be further studied among adolescents.

Key messages
- Subjective social status was strongly associated to self-rated health among Swedish adolescents
- Subjective social status among adolescents was not associated to their parents’ educational level