The Social Determinants of Mental Health

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The Social Determinants of Mental Health

- Definitions
- Historical Context
- Key Concepts
- Evidence-Based Examples
- Best Practices/Solutions
Those factors that impact upon health and well-being: the circumstances into which we are born, grow up, live, work, and age, including the health system.

These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices.
The social determinants of health are prominently responsible for health disparities and inequities.

*Health disparities*: differences in health status among distinct segments of the population including differences that occur by gender, race or ethnicity, education or income, disability, or living in various geographic localities

*Health inequities*: disparities in health that are a result of systemic, avoidable, and unjust social and economic policies and practices that create barriers to opportunity
Individuals with serious mental illnesses die, on average, up to 25 years earlier than the general population.
Culture Counts

“Even more than other areas of health and medicine, the mental health field is plagued by disparities in the availability of and access to its services. These disparities are viewed readily through the lenses of racial and cultural diversity, age, and gender.”
Social Justice
Defining Social Justice

The distribution of good (advantages) and bad (disadvantages) in society, and more specifically how these things should be distributed in society. It is concerned with the ways that resources are allocated to people by social institutions.

-David Miller-
Defining Social Justice

Assuring the protection of equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society.

- John Rawls-
How Does Social Justice Relate to Health?

• Social justice is considered the moral foundation of public health.
• It is concerned with human well-being.
• It ensures that individuals in a society have equal opportunities to lead healthy, meaningful, and productive lives.

Suicide (1897) demonstrated the relationship between social exclusion and suicide. Described suicide as a social phenomenon.
Faris and Dunham (1939) Mental disorders in urban areas: an ecological study of schizophrenia and other psychoses suggested an inverse relationship between social organization and schizophrenia.
The Rise of Biological Psychiatry

• Shift in the field to the individual factors associated with mental illness – molecular and genetic risk factors and determinants
• This movement has led to major strides in research and treatment of mental illness
• Advances in genetics, neurobiology, and pharmacology
• An unfortunate byproduct is that focus has moved away from examining how social processes contribute to mental illness
Nature and Nurture

- Previously presented as two competing realms at odds
- The interplay between biology and the environment is key
- One cannot understand biology without understanding the socio-environmental context
- Mechanisms underpinning social factors cannot be understood without considering neurobiology
Determinants of Health and Their Contribution to Premature Death

- Genetic Predisposition: 30%
- Social Circumstances: 15%
- Environmental Exposure: 5%
- Behavioral Patterns: 40%
- Health Care: 10%

The Causes of the Causes

“The Fundamental Causes of Disease”

If risk factors are the precursors of disease, then the environmental and contextual factors that precede or shape these risk factors are the causes of the causes.

The Social Determinants of Mental Health

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Conceptualizing the Social Determinants of Mental Health

Health Care System
- Health Policy
  - Poor Access to Care

Pathogens/Toxins
- Injury
- Genetic Risk

Social, Environmental, and Behavioral Risk
- Poor Mental Health, Disease, Morbidity
  - Reduced Options
  - Poor Choices
  - High-Risk Behaviors
  - Stress

Un/Underemployment and Job Insecurity
- Adverse Early Life Experiences

Food Insecurity
- Discrimination/Social Exclusion

Poor Built Environment
- Poor Education

Housing Insecurity
- Poverty/Income Inequality

Distribution of Opportunity

Public Policies

Social Norms

G X E
Adverse Early Life Experiences

Inconsistent, threatening, hurtful, traumatic, or neglectful social interchanges experienced by fetuses, infants, children, or adolescents.
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abuse</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th>Household Dysfunction</th>
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<td>• Emotional</td>
<td>• Mother treated violently</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Emotional</td>
<td>• Physical</td>
<td>• Household substance abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Household mental illness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Parental separation or divorce</td>
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ACEs are Highly Prevalent

More than 60% of the population surveyed reported one or more ACEs.
Health Problems Associated with ACEs

- Alcohol use disorders
- Depression
- Illicit drug use
- Suicide attempts
- Teen pregnancies
- Smoking
- COPD
- Fetal death
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Hearing voices

- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Multiple sexual partners
- STDs
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Early mortality
Relationship of ACE Score to Having Attempted Suicide in Adulthood

Poverty and Income Inequality

• Federal poverty line (2015)
  • $24,250 for family of four
  • $11,770 for one person

• “Near poor” is between 100% and 200% of federal poverty level.

• 14.8% of Americans (46.7 million) were living in poverty in 2014
The Juvenilization of Poverty

About **40% of children** in the United States are poor or near poor.
Mental Health Related Outcomes Associated with Poverty and Income Inequality

- Depressive disorders
- Poor self-reported mental health
- Drug overdose deaths
- Juvenile homicides
- Delinquency

- Anxiety disorders
- PTSD
- Increased arrests
- Cognitive, behavioral, and attention-related problems in children
Inequality and Depression Prevalence by State

“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Being willing is not enough, we must do.”
Success in Addressing the Social Determinants of Behavioral Health

- Nurse-Family Partnerships
- High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and Head Start
- Good Behavior Game
- Health Leads
- Medical-Legal Partnerships
Conceptualizing the Social Determinants of Mental Health

Health Care System

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Social, Environmental, and Behavioral Risk

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Reduced Options

- Un/Underemployment and Job Insecurity
  - Adverse Early Life Experiences

Poor Choices

- Food Insecurity
  - Discrimination/Social Exclusion

High-Risk Behaviors

- Poor Environment
  - Poor Education

Stress

- Housing Insecurity
  - Poverty/Income Inequality

Distribution of Opportunity

Public Policies

Social Norms
Clinical Interventions

• Screening and preventive interventions.
• Addressing policies in work settings
• Developing resource guides for clients and staff.
• Referring clients to available supports (supported employment, supported education, supportive housing, poverty assistance programs, SNAP benefits, etc).
Policy Interventions

Public Policies

• Advocate for policies and laws that improve education, increase employment opportunities (or extend employment benefits for the unemployed), decrease food insecurity, end discrimination, improve housing standards, etc.

• Offer your expertise to your elected officials (individually, or through professional organizations)

• Cross-sector collaborations are key
Policy Interventions

Social Norms

- Community Education and Engagement
  - About the importance of cultural competence
  - About the negative impact of stigma
- Use laws to change norms
  - Create a culture of tolerance and acceptance
  - Speak up when this culture is not respected
“Reducing health inequities is...an ethical imperative. Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.”