Social Determinants of Mental Health Across the Lifespan

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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.
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.
THE CAUSAL CHAIN

“Why is Jason in the hospital?”

Because he has a bad infection in his leg.

But why does he have an infection?

He has a cut on his leg and it got infected.

But why does he have a cut on his leg?

He was playing in a junk yard next to his apartment building and fell on some sharp, jagged steel there.

But why was he playing in a junk yard?

His neighborhood is run down. Kids play there and there is no one to supervise them.

But why does he live in that neighborhood?

His parents can’t afford a nicer place to live.

But why can’t his parents afford a nicer place to live?

His dad is unemployed and his mom is sick.

But why is his dad unemployed?

Because he doesn’t have much education and he can’t find a job.

But why?”

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO PREMATURE DEATH

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

Individuals with serious mental illnesses die, on average, up to 25 years earlier than the general population.
Racial and ethnic minority groups:

- Have **less access** to and availability of care
- Receive generally **poorer quality** mental health services
- Experience a **greater disability** burden from unmet mental health needs
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-
“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

Stigma Against People with Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders
The social determinants of mental health are not distinctly different from the social determinants of health

But deserve special emphasis, because:

- mental illnesses and substance use disorders are highly prevalent and highly disabling
- behavioral health conditions are high-cost, high-morbidity, and high-mortality illnesses
- they have been largely neglected in conversations and interventions about the social determinants of health
Homelessness, Housing Instability
Food Insecurity
Transportation Insecurity
Poor Access to Healthcare

Adverse Features of the Built Environment
Neighborhood Disorder
Pollution Exposure
Climate Change

Adverse Early Life Experiences
Discrimination
Exposure to Violence, Conflict
Interaction with the Criminal Justice System

Low Education
Unemployment, Underemployment
Poverty, Income Inequality
Area-Level Poverty

Reduced Options, “Poor Choices”
Behavioral Risk Factors
Physiologic Stress Responses
Psychological Stress

Adverse Mental Health Outcomes

Unfair and Unjust Distribution of Opportunity

Public Policies
Social Norms

Unfair and Unjust Distribution of Opportunity

Reduced Options, “Poor Choices”
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Adverse Mental Health Outcomes

Unfair and Unjust Distribution of Opportunity

Public Policies
Social Norms
Public Policies

Social Norms
“Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale.”

-Rudolph Virchow
Addressing Public Policies

01 Take action beyond the walls of our clinics, treatment centers, and hospitals

02 Advocate for policies that increase employment opportunities, end structural racism, improve housing standards, etc.

03 Communicate with elected officials (individually, or through community and professional organizations)

04 Form strong cross-sector collaborations and relationships
People live longer in countries that spend more on "social care" programs that support health.

Social care spending (percentage of GDP):

France 36, Sweden 32, Germany 29, Netherlands 28, United Kingdom 27, New Zealand 26, Australia 23, United States 22, Canada 21.

Life expectancy:

France 82, Sweden 82, Germany 81, Netherlands 81, United Kingdom 81, New Zealand 81, Australia 82, United States 79, Canada 82.

The United States is the only country that spends more treating health issues vs social care programs.

United States:

- Health care: 70%
- Social care: 30%

Other high-income countries:

- Health care: 60%
- Social care: 40%

And prevention programs get only 3 percent of US health care dollars.

Changing Social Norms

01  Create social norms of tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion

02  Partner with communities, with an emphasis on inclusion and mutual respect

03  **Educate** and **legislate** to effectively change social norms

04  Cultivate a culture of social inclusion, and **speak up** when this culture is not respected
“When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

– Audre Lorde