Joan Lewis

UD86023PH95244

Society & Health

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Introduction

Society & Health in Public Health

Understanding the relationship between society and health is crucial in shaping effective public health policies and interventions. Therefore, society and health as it relates to public health can be defined as a multidisciplinary field focused on the protection and improvement of the health of populations through the promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention of disease and injury, and the creation of conditions that allow people to live long, healthy lives.

When we speak of society in public health we see that it encompasses the collective behaviors, institutions, values, and norms of a community or group. Public health on the other hand examines how societal factors influence health and vice versa. Public health also aims to understand how societal factors impact health outcomes. This includes studying how social determinants like income, education, and housing affect health and wellbeing. Public health interventions often focus on improving societal conditions to enhance health outcomes and reduce health disparities.

The Impact of Social Determinants on Communities and Health Outcomes

Society also plays a fundamental role in determining health outcomes through several avenues such as Social Determinants of Health, Cultural Influences and Environmental

Conditions to name a few. By understanding the interplay between societal factors and health, public health professionals can design more effective interventions and policies to improve health outcomes on both individual and community levels.

This interplay between society and health can be integrated into various aspects such as: Socioeconomic Status where higher income and education levels are generally associated with better health outcomes, Social Inequities where social determinants such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to education can lead to poorer health outcomes and health disparities, and Community Health where strong social networks and supportive community environments contribute to better health and can facilitate health-promoting behaviors.

The Role of Healthcare Accessibility in Achieving Health Equity

As healthcare paves the way to a brighter future, accessibility is a fundamental factor in achieving health equity, as it ensures that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, geographical location, or other demographic factors, have the opportunity to receive appropriate and timely medical care. When health disparities are reduced, equitable access can ensure that all individuals have access to healthcare services. Populations that historically have had limited access to care, such as low-income or marginalized groups, can experience improved health outcomes when barriers to healthcare are removed. Another factor which is to be looked at and implemented is eliminating financial barriers.

By making insurance coverage universal and available to all, or expanded insurance coverage, ensures that individuals are not deterred from seeking care due to financial constraints. Programs like Medicaid or subsidized health insurance plans aim to reduce out-of-pocket costs and

financial burdens associated with healthcare. Also, enhancing geographical accessibility such as healthcare facilities can thereby increase the availability of healthcare facilities in underserved areas, including rural or economically disadvantaged communities. These access helps ensure that geographical barriers do not impede access to care.

Additionally, cultural competency and language services are pivotal in the language barrier spectrum. Inclusive care can provide culturally competent care and language services to help ensure that diverse populations receive care that respects their cultural beliefs and language preferences, thereby improving patient satisfaction and adherence to treatment plans.

The Relationship Between Social Support Networks and Mental Health

Mental health and social networks are closely interrelated. There's a lingering marriage relationship between the two. One is undoubtedly ready to fail without the other. This relationship between the two are key areas of interest in public health, reflecting the broader interplay between society and health. Social support networks—comprising family, friends, community groups, and other social connections—play a significant role in influencing mental health outcomes.

These outcomes can impact the health and wellbeing of individuals negatively or positively, depending on the support levels and or the direction in which these are heading, and achieving a successful outcome can vary when dealing with such subjects. First, let's begin with the emotional aspect of this relationship. Emotional Support in the form of social support provides emotional resources, such as empathy, understanding, and encouragement, which can buffer

individuals from stress and reduce feelings of isolation. This emotional support is linked to lower rates of depression and anxiety.

We also have what is called mechanisms of influence in the mode of support where stress buffering along with social support acts as a buffer against stress by offering coping resources and helping individuals manage stressful situations more effectively. This buffering effect can mitigate the negative impact of stress on mental health.

 A multitude of instrumental support can also be made readily available in the form of practical assistance, such as help with daily tasks or financial support, can alleviate stressors that might otherwise negatively impact mental health. Access to this type of support can be crucial during life transitions or crises. Self-esteem and identity are strong social connections that can enhance self-esteem and provide a sense of belonging and identity, which are important for psychological well-being. Individuals with robust social networks often experience higher life satisfaction and resilience.

Health behaviors and patterns are crucial and can be integrated with social networks to influence health and behaviors, such as adherence to treatment, engagement in physical activity, and substance use. Positive social support encourages healthier behaviors, which in turn support mental health. Alongside these, public health implications such as intervention designs by which public health interventions incorporate strategies to strengthen social support networks and community programs such as support groups, and family counseling. These programs aim to improve mental health outcomes by enhancing social support.

Policy development can also be developed to enhance health policies that foster community engagement, social cohesion, and accessible mental health services which can in turn improve

social support systems and, consequently, mental health outcomes. Addressing social determinants of health through policy can help build supportive environments that benefit mental health.

Vulnerable populations can be negatively impacted in areas where isolation and marginalization exists. Individuals who experience social isolation, discrimination, or marginalization may face increased risks of poor mental health. Public health efforts often focus on reducing these vulnerabilities by promoting inclusion and access to supportive networks. Another negative impact can be inclusive within the elderly and disabled populations. Social support is particularly crucial and imperative for elderly individuals and those with disabilities, who may face challenges related to mobility, health, and social interaction. Programs designed to enhance social connectivity for these groups can improve their mental health and overall quality of life.

Impact of Public Health Policies on Societal Health

As public health becomes more and more significant globally, its policies can have a profound impact on societal health by the way the conditions under which individuals and communities live, work, and interact are shaped. These policies influence various aspects of health, from disease prevention to health promotion, and are crucial in addressing health disparities and improving overall well-being.

For instance, when dealing with disease prevention and control, vaccination program policies that mandate or promote vaccinations, have been instrumental in controlling and eradicating infectious diseases. In cases such as childhood vaccination programs, these have significantly reduced the incidence of diseases like measles, polio, and whooping cough.

Policies such as screening and early detection, public health often include guidelines for routine screenings (e.g., for cancer, diabetes) which facilitate early detection and treatment, reducing the prevalence and severity of diseases. In using health promotion, policies on nutrition and physical activities that promote healthy eating and physical activity, such as school nutrition standards and public exercise facilities, contribute much to the prevention and control of chronic diseases like obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Even tobacco and alcohol regulations, anti-smoking laws and regulations on alcohol consumption (such as age restrictions and taxation) can reduce the prevalence of smoking-related diseases and excessive alcohol use. Health equity policies can also play a crucial role in ensuring access to care, that expand access to healthcare services, such as universal health coverage or subsidies for low-income individuals, help reduce health disparities and ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to receive necessary medical care.

Furthermore, social determinants of public health policies that address social determinants of health—such as housing, education, and employment—can reduce inequalities and improve health outcomes across different population groups. These policies shed valuable insights into how public health policies influence various aspects of societal health and highlight the importance of policy development in improving population health outcomes.

The Role of Media in Health Promotion and Misinformation

Media plays a significant role in both health promotion and the dissemination of misinformation. This dual influence can have profound effects on public health by shaping health behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. When used appropriately media can model positive health behaviors by featuring stories of individuals who have successfully adopted healthy lifestyles.

This can inspire and encourage others to make similar changes. Whereas, when media is used inappropriately, it can directly influence public opinion on health issues. Spread of false information and inaccurate reporting used by media outlets may sometimes report health information that is inaccurate or misleading. This can be due to insufficient fact-checking, reliance on unverified sources, or sensationalism aimed at attracting viewers. This can become very toxic if not sufficiently fact checked.

The proliferation of pseudoscience and unverified health claims on social media platforms can also mislead the public. For example, misinformation about vaccines or unapproved treatments can lead to harmful health behaviors and reduced public health outcomes. Notwithstanding the impact on public perception, media can also be used in the form of health information where media provides valuable health information through news articles, health programs, and online platforms, helping individuals stay informed about health issues, new research findings, and preventive measures. Given the fact that the media has had a huge impact on public perception, confusion and anxiety almost always arise.

Misinformation perpetuates confusion and anxiety among the public, making it difficult for individuals to distinguish between credible and non-credible health information. This can lead to poor health decisions and reduced trust in legitimate health authorities.

Effects of Environmental Factors on Public Health

The effects of environmental factors on public health have been a subject of increasing concern and interest in recent years. With the exposure to various environmental pollutants, toxins, and hazards, posing a threat to human health, it is extremely important to understand and to identify the several key trends, themes, databases, and gaps in the development of certain

exposures and increase in long-term health effects, including developmental issues in children and kidney damage.

Studies have consistently shown that exposure to air pollution, water contamination, climate change and hazardous chemicals have a detrimental impact on health outcomes, leading to an increased risk of respiratory diseases, cardiovascular disorders, and cancer. Additionally, research has highlighted the disproportionate burden of environmental hazards on marginalized communities and individuals.

The effects of poor air quality, characterized by high levels of pollutants like particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), and sulfur dioxide (SO2), is linked to respiratory diseases such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and even cardiovascular diseases (e.g., heart attacks, strokes). And as a result of those contaminants, the mortality rate of long-term exposure to polluted air has been on the rise.

In 2016, a research of Brown et al, demonstrated that contaminated water sources lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever. Contaminated water has also led to the spread of diseases such as dysentery, and hepatitis.

Even the effects of climate change has brought about heat-related illnesses with an increased frequency of extreme heat events that can lead to heat exhaustion and heatstroke, even death. With vector-borne diseases, changes in the climate affects the distribution of vectors (e.g., mosquitoes) that spread diseases like malaria and dengue fever. Consequently, due to climate change, impacts on agricultural productivity, affects food security and nutrition.

The Role of Education in Promoting Health Literacy

Education is essential for enabling individuals to make informed health decisions and engage effectively with the healthcare system which makes education a valuable tool in public

health. Health literacy encompasses the ability to understand and use health information to make decisions about one's health by providing individuals with the knowledge and skills needed in doing so.

By teaching people how to access and understand health information, education empowers them to be better equipped and to navigate through educational programs that help them understand medical terms, procedures, and preventive measures. By improving comprehension, individuals can better follow health advice and treatment plans. Education also helps foster critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to evaluate the credibility of health information sources and make informed choices. By taking control of their health and behaviors, individuals are more likely to take proactive steps in managing their health and reducing the risk of chronic diseases.

Education improves patients' ability to ask questions, articulate concerns, and understand responses from healthcare providers, leading to better patient-provider communication. Health literacy programs often emphasize the importance of shared decision-making, where patients are active participants in their own healthcare choices and adopt healthy behaviors.

The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Health Outcomes in Public Health

As race and ethnicity lingers on the mind of many, their relationship in public health has been a topic of interest for decades. Understanding how these factors influence health outcomes will provide insights for future studies and interventions to identify how race, ethnicity, gender and other social identities affect healthcare, discrimination and environmental factors. Several important factors such as income, education, housing, and neighborhood conditions can bring about differences in health outcomes across racial and ethnic groups. Other factors that can be

attributed to a variety of inequality experiences may include socioeconomic status, access to healthcare, cultural practices, and experiences of discrimination.

With economic disparities, where economic inequalities often correlate with race and ethnicity, influences access to healthcare, quality of care, and health outcomes. Lower-income individuals may face barriers such as lack of insurance, inadequate transportation, and less access to preventive care. Certain criterias, such as cultural practices and beliefs can also influence health behaviors such as diet, exercise, and health-seeking behaviors. For example, dietary practices rooted in cultural traditions can impact the prevalence of certain health conditions.

Again as traditional medicine moves closer to some racial and ethnic groups, they may rely more and more on traditional medicine or alternative therapies, which can affect their interaction with the conventional healthcare system.

Experiencing racism and discrimination can lead to chronic stress, which negatively impacts physical and mental health. This stress can contribute to higher rates of hypertension, mental health issues, and other health problems even death. In return, these health outcomes will in the future be alternatively related to experiences of racial discrimination that are associated with poorer health outcomes across various if not all domains. Furthermore, infant mortality rates are on the rise as we see that where there are significant disparities among different racial and ethnic groups, there are for instance, black infants have higher mortality rates compared to white infants.

Conclusion

Overall, the relationship between society and health in public health is complex and multifaceted. It is clear that social determinants play a significant role in shaping health outcomes, highlighting the importance of addressing societal issues to improve public health. Moving forward, a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of society and health is crucial in promoting wellbeing for all individuals. By addressing all factors such as income inequality, education, and access to healthcare, public health interventions can be more effective in promoting and improving health equity and priority in public health outcomes.

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