

Pre-Session Reading: The Social Determinants of Health

Learning Goals and Objectives

1. Describe how the social determinants of health play a role in creating and perpetuating health disparities.
 - a. Define five critical social determinants and their impact on health. (*Knowledge*)
 - b. Articulate how the three important components of Socio-Economic Status (SES) contribute to health disparities. (*Knowledge*)
 - c. Evaluate the impact of income inequality on health outcomes and life expectancy in the United States and abroad. (*Skill*)
2. Describe the local, state and federal programs that decrease the rates of poverty and mitigate the effects of poverty on child health in the US.
 - a. Describe three federal income based programs that effectively decrease rates of poverty. (*Knowledge*)
 - b. Analyze the impact of educational and community based programs that invest in children and families long term to reverse the cycle of generational poverty and educational disparities. (*Skill*)
 - c. Explain how the funding mechanisms for education affect educational inequities between communities and nations and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. (*Skill*)

This document is designed to prepare you for our upcoming discussion on the Social Determinants of Health. Start by reviewing the learning goals and objectives above – this will help you to focus on the most important details as we go through this information. Next review the information on the two pages that follow as well as the resources that are linked within it (one short video and one short media article).

These materials are designed to be brief – you can plan to spend about 10-30 minutes in total reviewing them. Don't worry if you do not understand everything by the end of this document – we will be digging in as we go through the material together during the session.

What are the Social Determinants of Health?

The social determinants of health (SDH) are the conditions or circumstances in which people are born, grow-up and age that affect their overall health, health risks, and quality of life. These individual circumstances are influenced by wider societal forces including economics and policy. Socio-economic status (SES) is a closely related concept and is defined as the combination of *Income, Education, and Occupation*. The video linked below introduces key concepts in understanding SDH. As you watch this video reflect on the following:

- One of the commentators in the video remarks “Health care can deal with diseases and illnesses but a lack of health care is not the cause of illness and disease.” Is this statement consistent with your view of the role of health care in health disparities? Why or why not?

WATCH THIS VIDEO

- Health in America VIDEO EXCERPT, Unnatural Causes - Episode 1:
http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips_detail.php?res_id=213

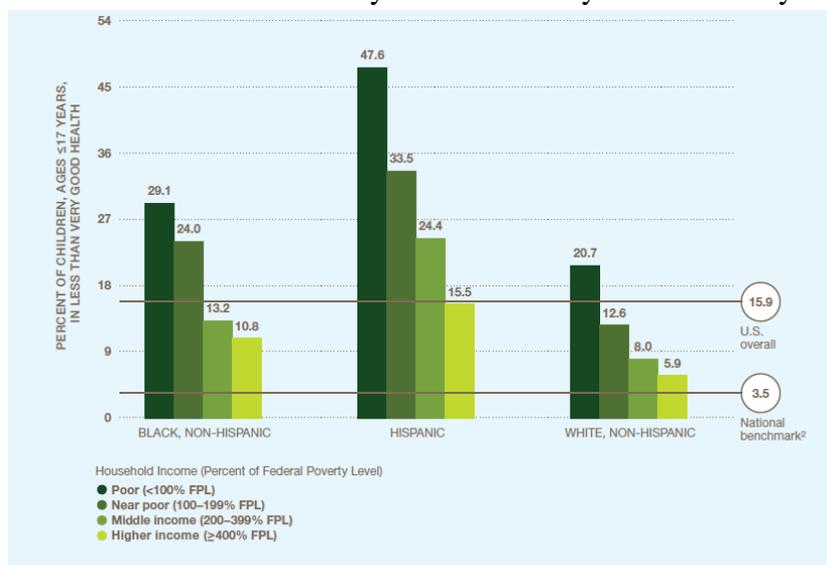
How do the social determinants interact with each other and with health?

Income Inequality and Health

Income inequality is at the root of many forms of inequality related to the social determinants of health. Many studies have demonstrated clear links between income inequality and poor health outcomes. Review the figure below from a 2008 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report and answer the following questions:

- Describe the relationship between income level and child health.
- How does that relationship vary across racial and ethnic groups?

Figure 1: Percent Children in Less than Very Good Health by Race/Ethnicity and Income Level



Prepared for the RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America by the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of California, San Francisco.

Source: 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

1 Based on parental assessment and measured as poor, fair, good, very good or excellent. Health reported as less than very good was considered to be less than optimal.
2 The national benchmark for children's general health status represents the level of health that should be attainable for all children in every state. The benchmark used here—3.5 percent of children with health that was less than optimal, seen in Colorado—is the lowest statistically-reliable rate observed in any state among children whose families were not only higher income but also practiced healthy behaviors (i.e., non-smokers and at least one person who exercised regularly). Rates with relative standard errors of 30 percent or less were considered to be statistically reliable.

Educational Inequality and the Cycle of Poverty

Educational level is tied to numerous health outcomes for both children and adults both directly and via its impacts on occupation and income. The funding for public education in the US varies substantially from district to district and state to state with most school districts relying in large part on local property and income taxes to fund the schools. As a result school districts serving children with high rates of household poverty have less money to spend per student. This is in spite of the fact that children living in poverty often have greater educational needs and fewer resources to support education outside of the school. Because educational attainment is a key strategy for rising out of poverty, the net effect of this inequality in school funding is to contribute to a generational cycle of poverty. To further explore the interaction between educational inequalities and child poverty, please read the following brief article that summarizes the Center for American Progress Report “The Stealth Inequities of School Funding.” As you read think about different school districts that you have experienced – your own or those of your children, the ones your patients attend, etc.

- What differences have you noticed between schools in different districts? Have you noticed an association between community income and the quality of the schools?
- Do you ever hear people talking about which districts are “good” or “bad”? What factors go into those value judgments?

READ THIS ARTICLE:

- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/20/state-and-local-school-fi_n_1898225.html

How do we mitigate the effects of poverty and lift children and families out of poverty?

Federal Entitlement Programs

Three federal entitlement programs in particular – the earned income tax credit (EITC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid/CHIP – have the potential to significantly impact the lives of children living in poverty and effectively lift those families above the poverty level. We will explore these programs in detail during the in-class session. For now use your favorite search engine to see what you can find out about EITC, SNAP and Medicaid/CHIP in your city/state and how families can apply for those resources.

Educational and Community-Based Programs

There are many educational and community-based programs that invest in children and families to produce long-term impacts on poverty and educational outcomes. We will explore several programs during the session including Early Start/Head Start, Nurse Family Partnership, Reach Out and Read, and the Harlem Children’s Zone.

Web Quest Activity:

The Harlem Children’s Zone is a unique neighborhood-based program. Does your community have similar programs? Using the internet and any other resources available to you (clinic social worker, etc) identify one program in your community that address the needs of children living in poverty and come prepared to discuss in the session.