Looking Upstream
A webinar presented by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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How Social Factors Shape Health: Income, Wealth and Health

1. Introduction

People often wonder why some benefit from better income and wealth. Sometimes, these benefits are unexpected. For example, people who are born in rural areas tend to be healthier than those who are born in urban areas. This is because people in rural areas tend to have better access to healthcare and other social services. In addition, people in rural areas tend to have less stress and better social support than those in urban areas. However, findings on the relationship between income and health are not consistent, and the effects of income on health vary by race and ethnicity. Income also affects health through life experiences, such as chronic stress, which can lead to chronic diseases.

Race and Socioeconomic Factors Affect Opportunities for Better Health

1. Striking Differences in Health Are Seen Among Racial or Ethnic Groups

Data from the National Health Information Survey (NHIS) shows that income is a key factor in health disparities. Poor and minority populations are more likely to experience poor health outcomes compared to better-off and non-minority populations. In addition, income affects access to healthcare, education, and other social services. The NHIS shows that people with higher incomes have better access to healthcare and are more likely to receive preventive care than those with lower incomes.

To understand health disparities, it is not enough to consider only race or only socioeconomic factors. Both factors play a role.

Education Matters for Health

1. Introduction

Education matters for health, even when other factors like income are taken into account. A large body of evidence links education with health. People with higher levels of education tend to have better health outcomes than those with lower levels of education. This is true for both adults and children. Education is associated with better health behaviors, such as better diet and exercise, and with better access to healthcare services.

To sum up, education is a key factor in health outcomes. Higher levels of education are associated with better health outcomes, even when income is taken into account.
More health care spending but less health: Life expectancy

1. Japan (82.3 years)  
2. Australia  
3. Canada  
4. Spain  
5. Sweden/Switzerland  
6. Israel  
7. Iceland  
8. New Zealand  
9. Italy  
10. Norway  
11. Ireland  
12. United Kingdom  
13. Greece  
14. Austria  
15. Netherlands  
16. Luxembourg  
17. Germany  
18. Belgium  
19. Finland  
20. Korea  
21. Denmark  
22. Portugal  
23. United States (78.2 years)  
24. Chile  
25. Slovenia  
26. Czech Republic

Source: CIA: *The World Factbook* online, January 2011 (2010 estimate)
What influences health?

- Medical care
- Genetic makeup
- Climate and natural physical environment
- Behaviors, nutrition
- What else?
- And what influences the influences?
UPSTREAM:
The source

DOWNSTREAM:
The immediate exposure
Clues? Large disparities by race/ethnic group and income, e.g. life expectancy at age 25

Source: NLMS, 1988-1998
Higher income, better child health

% of children, 0-17yrs with fair or poor health

Family Income (% of Federal Poverty Level, FPL)

Racial/ethnic differences do not explain the income differences in health: adult health

Source: NHIS 2001-2005. Age-adjusted
Racial/ethnic differences do not explain education differences in health

Source: NHIS 2001-2005. Age-adjusted
How could income affect health?

Income directly shapes:
• Medical care
• Housing
• Nutrition
• Physical activity
• Neighborhood conditions
• Stress

Parents’ income shapes the next generation’s:
• Education
• Working conditions
• Income
Higher income, less stress
For example, separation or divorce during pregnancy

Other stressors: domestic violence, job loss, incarceration, no social support, homeless, food insecurity, financial strain...

Source: MIHA 2003-2006 (CDPH/MCAH)
Income affects neighborhood options

Neighborhoods affect health

- Safe places to exercise
- Access to healthy food
- Targeted advertising of alcohol and tobacco
- Social networks and support
- Norms, role models, peer pressure
- Fear, anxiety, stress, despair
- Quality of schools
- Segregation often puts Blacks & Hispanics in unhealthier neighborhoods than similar-income Whites
Education can shape health behaviors by determining knowledge and skills

- Educational attainment
  - Health knowledge
  - Literacy
  - Problem-solving
  - Coping skills

- Diet
  - Exercise
  - Smoking
  - Health/disease management
Education can shape health by determining work and income

- Educational attainment
- Work
  - Work-related resources
    - Income
      - Neighborhood environment
      - Diet & exercise options
        - Stress
    - Health insurance
      - Sick leave
      - Stress
      - Wellness programs
    - Working conditions
      - Control / demand imbalance
        - Stress

HEALTH
Education can shape health through psychosocial pathways

- **Educational attainment**
  - Social standing
    - Social & economic resources
      - Stress
      - Perceived status
    - Control beliefs (powerlessness, sense/locus of control, fatalism, mastery)
  - Social networks
    - Social & economic resources
      - Norms
      - Social support
      - Stress
    - Coping
      - Response to stressors
  - HEALTH
Racial/ethnic disparities in income

At each income level, whites have far more wealth

Median net worth (assets minus debts) 2000 Census.
SIPP. April 2008.
Racial/ethnic disparities in childhood socioeconomic circumstances

- Latina-US born
- Latina immigrants
- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- European American

% of college graduates with a college-graduate parent
Both race/ethnic group and income matter for health. (Similar by education, not shown)

The legacy of legal discrimination: Socioeconomic disadvantage

Due to the legacy of discrimination, at a given income or educational level, African Americans on average:

- Live in unhealthier neighborhoods
- Have far less wealth and were worse off in childhood
- Experience more hardship with fewer resources to cope
- Studies rarely measure these factors, but often conclude a racial difference must be genetic because it persists after “control for SES”
- Race/ethnicity often captures unmeasured socioeconomic factors
And psychological effects of racial discrimination may harm health

- Structural racial discrimination exposes blacks and Latinos to worse living conditions and more stress related to economic hardship, even without conscious intent to discriminate.
- In addition, overt and subtle incidents are still pervasive and stressful.
- Internalized racism could harm health by undermining self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Chronic concern about unfair perceptions or treatment based on race could be stressful, even without overt incidents.
Looking Upstream: How income, education, and racial inequality shape health

Economic & Social Opportunities & Resources

Living & Working Conditions in Homes & Communities

Medical Care

Personal Behavior

HEALTH

Twitter: #HealthIsSocial
Q&A

Note: solutions and policies will be discussed during the second Q & A
Education can shape health by determining work and income

- Educational attainment
- Work
  - Work-related resources
  - Working conditions
- Income
  - Health insurance
  - Sick leave
  - Wellness programs
- Health
  - Neighborhood environment
  - Diet & exercise options
  - Stress
  - Control / demand imbalance
  - Stress

Twitter: #HealthIsSocial
The County Health Calculator

- Online simulation tool developed by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs
- Purpose: to explore how health is associated with education, income, and the living conditions to which they are linked
- Focus:
  - Education: percent of adults with some college education
  - Income: percent of individuals with a basic household income (greater than 200% of the poverty level)
Ohio: Delaware and Knox

New York: Bronx, Queens and Nassau
“I was able to get in one last lecture about diet and exercise.”
Finding solutions: Understanding the importance of social factors

Policies to promote healthier homes, neighborhoods, schools and workplaces

- Promote child and youth development and education, infancy through college
- Promote economic development, reduce poverty, and reduce racial segregation

Policies to:

Economic & Social Opportunities & Resources

Living & Working Conditions in Homes & Communities

Medical Care

Personal Behavior

 HEALTH
Final Questions & Answers

Upon exiting, you will be redirected to a web page where you can access the issue briefs discussed during today’s webinar. A recording will also be available there soon.

Thank you!

Join the Twitter discussion: #HealthIsSocial