

Sociology and Public Health: Understanding the intersections

Sociology is the study of society and human behavior, and plays a critical role in forming a concrete understanding of public health. Therefore it provides a framework on how social structures, interactions, and institutions influence health outcomes and access to healthcare. Integrating sociological perspectives place public health professionals in a position to comprehend the social determinants of health-those nonmedical elements such as socioeconomic status, education, environment, and culture that strongly influence health conditions.

Previous studies relating to public health were only focused at the population level to prevent disease and promote health. However, sociological perspectives have enriched the understanding of the impact of social inequalities such as income disparity, gender, race, and ethnicity on health and illness. In the book *Health and Social Change: A Critical Theory* by Graham Scambler reported several studies highlighting disparities in health care access, chronic illness prevalence rates, and life expectancy among populations emanating from marginalized communities as compared to the more privileged sections. Such an understanding that orients public health to attend not only to the biological causes of diseases but also those components of society that contributed to such diseases.

Sociology highlights the importance of social support networks and community dynamics in health promotion and disease prevention. Social capital refers to the resources available to individuals within communities and through networks; has been associated with better health outcomes. Communities with strong social bonds often have higher rates of health-promoting behaviors, such as regular physical activity and vaccination uptake. Public health interventions, therefore, have to take these social factors into consideration for sustainability and effectiveness.

Sociological imagination helps in the development and evaluation of public health policy through pointing out how health risks and outcomes are distributed inequitably in society. For example, there is evidence to suggest that policies aimed solely at individual behavior change without taking consideration of larger social and economic contexts are less likely to be effective. Therefore, a sociological approach develops holistic conceptions of health that take into consideration the complex play of social factors, allowing public health initiatives to be more responsive and equitable.

Sociology informs insights into public health by directing attention toward primacy of the social determinants, community dynamics, and the need for equity in policies. Synthesizing these



perspectives brings a more comprehensive way in which health outcomes can be improved at an individual level as well as at a societal level.

References:

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