Causes of the causes of health inequity

The NYS Moving on Maternal Depression Project

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The power of definitions
Health Disparity

• The differences or variations in the health achievements of individuals and groups

• A descriptive term, referring to measurable quantities

• Adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health
Health Inequality

• Interchangeable with health disparity

• Health disparities/inequalities include differences between the most advantaged group in a given category—e.g., the wealthiest, the most powerful racial/ethnic group—and all others, not only between the best- and worst-off groups (Braveman, 2002)
Health Equity

• Inequalities in health that are deemed to be unfair or stemming from some form of injustice

• Inequity and equity...are political concepts, expressing a moral commitment to social justice. (Kawachi, Subramanian, Almeida-Filho, 2002)
“History ... does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.” — James Baldwin
What is structural racism?

Structural racism refers to “the totality of ways in which societies foster [racial] discrimination, via mutually reinforcing [inequitable] systems...(eg, in housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care, criminal justice, etc.) that in turn reinforce discriminatory beliefs, values, and distribution of resources”, reflected in history, culture, and interconnected institutions.

Structural causes of inequalities are difficult to see because:

- We are so embedded in them
- They are woven into the fabric of our assumptions about how things operate
- They are self-perpetuating and don’t require active work to be maintained
- “Racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003)
Usage rates

1.3
Blacks used marijuana at 1.3 times the rate of whites.

Arrest rates

3.7
Blacks were arrested for marijuana possession at 3.7 times the rate of whites.

Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination

By Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan*

We study race in the labor market by sending fictitious resumes to help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago newspapers. To manipulate perceived race, resumes are randomly assigned African-American- or White-sounding names. White names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews. Callbacks are also more responsive to resume quality for White names than for African-American ones. The racial gap is uniform across occupation, industry, and employer size. We also find little evidence that employers are inferring social class from the names. Differential treatment by race still appears to still be prominent in the U.S. labor market. (JEL J71, J64).
Immigrant moms have had more preterm babies since Trump was elected

The study looked at all births in New York and found an especially pronounced effect among foreign-born Latina mothers.

2016 presidential election linked to premature births for foreign born mothers in NYC: Study

Stress from the 2016 presidential election and a concurrent rise in hate crimes may have affected the health of vulnerable New York City mothers.
How structural racism creates health inequity

Racist public policies, institutional practices, stereotypes and history in the United States

- Education
- Housing
- Employment
- Criminal Justice

Population Health Outcomes
Zip code better predictor of health than genetic code

August 4, 2014 — In St. Louis, Missouri, Delmar Boulevard marks a sharp dividing line between the poor, predominately African American neighborhood to the north and a more affluent, largely white neighborhood to the south. Education and health also follow the “Delmar Divide,” with residents to the north less likely to have a bachelor’s degree and more likely to have heart disease or cancer.

Why Zip Codes Mean More for Health Than Genetic Codes
Research shows designing healthy communities may matter more than DNA.

Why Your Zip Code May Be More Important to Your Health Than Your Genetic Code
Read More: Health, Health Care, Health Care Reform, Healthcare, Healthcare Reform, Politics News

Death by ZIP code: Investigating the root causes of health inequity
AUG 25, 2016
Long Island Among America’s Most Segregated Metro Areas

February 24, 2011 12:10 PM

HAUPPAUGE, NY (WCBS 880) - Long Island continues to be one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States, according to a new study.

Experts blame the problem on long-standing restrictive housing patterns.

A new study ranks the island the seventh most segregated among 50 major metro regions analyzed.

Researchers from Brown University and Florida State point out that it is really a black and white...
Non-Hispanic African American Population by Census Tract and Years of Potential Life Lost before age 75 (per 100,000)

Data from 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates and Sub-County Health Data Report
Childhood Asthma Emergency Department Visits

NYS Department of Health (2019). Asthma Emergency Department Visits in New York State by Region and County (2016)
Infant mortality rate 13.9 per 1,000 births (2012-2014)

Infant mortality rate 0 per 1,000 births (2012-2014)

NYS Department of Health, (2019). New York State County/ZIP Code Perinatal Data Profile
Key findings: 2007-2016 national data on pregnancy-related mortality

- For women over the age of 30, PRMR for black and AI/AN women was four to five times higher than it was for white women.
- The PRMR for black women with at least a college degree was 5.2 times that of their white counterparts.
- Cardiomyopathy, thrombotic pulmonary embolism, and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy contributed more to pregnancy-related deaths among black women than among white women.

Risk factors cannot fully explain African Americans’ higher maternal and infant mortality rates

• Most research on health disparities in maternal and infant mortality focus on African American women’s greater exposure to risk factors around the time of pregnancy, including poverty and low socioeconomic status; limited access to prenatal care; and poor physical and mental health

• Does not fully account for the racial gap in outcomes; rather, these disparities stem from racial and gender discrimination over the life span
  – African American women who initiated prenatal care in the first trimester still had higher rates of infant mortality than non-Hispanic white women with late or no prenatal care
  – A recent study from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene showed that African American women of normal weight were still at higher risk of dying in the perinatal period than non-African American obese women
Life Course Perspective

- Social and economic forces can profoundly affect African American women’s development across the life span
- Chronic exposures to stress leads to higher allostatic load and burden on body systems
- During pregnancy, chronically elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol lead to immune suppression, increasing women’s risk of perinatal infections
- Even if African American and non-Hispanic white women report similar levels of stress during their pregnancies, African American women’s increased exposure to stress throughout their lifetimes increases their allostatic load, which increases their risk of maternal and infant mortality

Housing Stability and Perinatal Outcomes

- Unstable housing documentation is associated with adverse obstetric outcomes and high health care utilization
- Housing and supplemental income for pregnant women should be explored as a potential intervention to prevent preterm birth and prevent increased health care utilization
Maternal Mortality
Infant Mortality

Maternal Morbidity
Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight

Pre-existing Conditions (CVD, Asthma, hypertension, obesity)
Clinical treatment

Toxic Stress, Vigilance
Weathering, Medical System structure

Structural and Interpersonal
Racism, Unconscious Bias, Economic Stability
Social determinants of health
Structural racism sets the table over and over again to serve up poor population health outcomes.
What are the causes of the causes?

Social determinants of health (housing, education level, wealth, employment)

Health disparities in communities of color
What are the causes of the causes?

- Stereotypes, policies, opportunities, and options informed by privileging whites
- Social determinants of health (housing, education level, wealth, employment)
- Health disparities in communities of color
Health Equity: Seven Foundational Practices

I. Expand the understanding of health in words and action

II. Assess and influence the policy context

III. Lead with an equity focus

IV. Use data to advance health equity

V. Advance health equity through continuous learning

VI. Support successful partnerships and strengthen community capacity

VII. Assure strategic and targeted use of resources

Source: Foundational Practices for Health Equity: A Learning and Action Tool for State Health Departments
"True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar.

It understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
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