

CONCEPT OF HEALTH

Dr. Victor Daka

3.0 CONCEPT OF HEALTH

- 3.1 Definition and description of health
 - 3.1.1 Objectives
 - At the end of this module, the students are expected to:
 - Define health
 - Describe the different concepts and perspectives of Health.
 - Describe determinants of health.
 - Define globalization & list its advantages and disadvantages on health population.
 - Describe the different models of disease causation theories

HEALTH

- The word health is widely used in public communication, and yet its meaning looks simple. However, closer looks show various and diverse meanings.
- This module in Introduction to Public Health discusses the various definitions and determinants of health. For the purpose of this module, we consider definitions from lay point of view, professional, World Health Organization (WHO).
- Lay Point of view: Persons are healthy when they are doing their activities with no apparent symptoms of disease in them. The New Oxford Dictionary of English describes health as ‘the state of being free from illness or injury’.

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- Professional points of view: From this point, health is defined as s a measure of the state of the physical bodily Organs, and the ability of the body as a whole to function. It refers to freedom from medically defined diseases.

WHO definition

- The world Health Organization (WHO) described health in 1948, in the preamble to its constitution, as “A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Recently this statement has been expanded to include the ability to lead a “socially and economically productive life”.
- The World Health Organization definition of health cannot be considered as an operational definition because it does not lend itself to direct measurement. In order to overcome this lacuna a WHO group has devised an operational definition of health.

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- In broader sense health can be defined as “a condition or quality of the human organism expressing the adequate functioning of the organism in given conditions, genetic or environmental” As evident from the above definitions, health is multidimensional.
- The WHO definition envisages three specific dimensions (physical, mental, and social), some other dimensions like spiritual, emotional may also be included.
- Physical health- is concerned with anatomical integrity and physiological functioning of the body.
- It means the ability to perform routine tasks without any physical restriction. E.g., Physical fitness is needed to walk from place to place

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- Mental Health- is the ability to learn and think clearly and coherently. E.g., a person who is not mentally fit (retarded) could not learn something new at a pace in which an ordinary normal person learns.
- Social health- is the ability to make and maintain acceptable interaction with other people. E.g. to celebrate during festivals; to mourn when a close family member dies; to create and maintain friendship and intimacy, etc

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- Emotional health - is the ability of expressing emotions in the appropriate way, for example to fear, to be happy, and to be angry. The response of the body should be congruent with that of the stimuli. Emotional health is related to mental health and includes feelings. It also means maintaining one's own integrity in the presence of stressful situation such as tension, depression and anxiety.
- Spiritual Health - Some people relate health with religion; for others it has to do with personal values, beliefs, principles and ways of achieving mental satisfaction, in which all are related to their spiritual wellbeing

Different perspectives on health

- Health is viewed as a right, as consumption good, and as an investment. Some view health as a right similar to justice or political freedom. The WHO constitution states that “. . . the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, and political belief, economic or social condition”.
- Others view health as an important individual objective of material aspect i.e. as consumption good.

Different perspectives on health

- The third view considers health as an investment, indicates health as an important prerequisite for development because of its consequence on the overall production through its effect on the productive ability of the productive force. These different views indicate differences in the emphases given to health by governments.

Determinants of health

- Health or ill health is the result of a combination of different factors. There are different perspectives in expressing the determinants of health of an individual or a community.

The health field concept

- According to the “Health field” concept. There are four major determinants of health or ill health.

A. Human Biology

- Every Human being is made of genes. In addition, there are factors, which are genetically transmitted from parents to offspring. As a result, there is a chance of transferring defective trait. The modern medicine does not have a significant role in these cases.
 - a. Genetic Counseling: For instance during marriage parents could be made aware of their genetic component in order to overcome some risks that could arise.
 - b. Genetic Engineering: may have a role in cases like Breast cancer.

B. Environment

- Environment is all that which is external to the individual human host. Those are factors outside the human body. Environmental factors that could influence health include:
 - a. Life support, food, water, air etc.
 - b. Physical factors, climate, Rain fall
 - c. Biological factors: microorganisms, toxins, Biological waste,
 - d. Psycho-social and economic e.g. Crowding, income level, access to health care
 - e. Chemical factors: industrial wastes, agricultural wastes, air pollution, etc

C. Life style (Behavior)

- Life style (Behavior) is an action that has a specific frequency, duration, and purpose, whether conscious or unconscious.
- It is associated with practice. It is what we do and how we act. Recently life style by itself received an increased amount of attention as a major determinant of health.
- Life style of individuals affects their health directly or indirectly. For example: Cigarette smoking unsafe sexual practice, eating contaminated food

D. Health care organization

- Health care organizations in terms of their resource in human power, equipment, and money and so on determine the health of people. It is concerned with
 - a. Availability of health service People living in areas where there is no access to health service are affected by health problems and have lower health status than those with accessible health services.
 - b. Scarcity of Health Services leads to inefficient health service and resulting in poor quality of health status of people.
 - c. Acceptability of the service by the community
 - d. Accessibility: in terms of physical distance, finance etc.
 - e. Quality of care that mainly focuses on the comprehensiveness, continuity and integration of the health care.

Ecological perspective

- The other view of the determinants of health is from the **ecological perspective**. Accordingly, there are four different factors affecting health.
1. Physical Determinants -The physical factors affecting the health of a community include: the geography (e.g. high land versus low land), the environment (e.g. manmade or natural catastrophes) and the industrial development (e.g. pollution occupational hazards)
 2. Socio – cultural determinants – The socio- cultural factors affecting the health of a community include the beliefs, traditions, and social customs in the community.
 3. Community organization - Community organization include the community size, arrangement and distribution of resources (“relations of productions”)
 4. Behavioral determinants- The behavioral determinants affecting health include individual behavior and life style affecting the health of an individual and the community. E.g. smoking, alcoholism and promiscuity

Globalization and Health

- Globalization is the process of increasing political and social interdependence and global integration that takes place as capital, traded goods, persons, concepts, images, ideas and values diffuse across the stated boundaries (Hurrell & Woods 1995).
- Globalization must ensure that people, particularly the poor, enjoy better health that is the most important factor in improving the economic wellbeing of the population in general and in reducing poverty in particular.

Effects of Globalization on Health

- The effects of Globalization on health are diverse; these can be positive, negative or mixed. Some of the effects of Globalization are listed hereunder. Effects of Globalization on health includes
- Externalities of some diseases due to increased communication and increased human mobility
- Accelerated economic growth and technological advances have enhanced health and life expectancy in many population
- Increasing effects of international and bilateral agencies (structural adjustment programs and Global initiatives)
- Jeopardizing population health Via erosion of social and environmental conditions and exacerbating inequalities

Other health risks of Globalization includes

- Fragmentation and weakening of labor markets due to greater power of mobile capital
- Tobacco induced diseases
- Food markets & obesity as well as chemicals in food
- Rapid spread of infectious diseases
- Depression in aged and fragmented population
- Adverse effects on the environment

Model of disease causation theories

- A model is a representation of a system that specifies its components and the relationships among the variables. E.g. includes graphs, charts, and decision trees

I – Nineteen-century models

- Each effort to prevent disease in the 19th century was based on one or the other three theories of disease causality. These are:
 - 1. Contagion theory
 - 2. Supernatural theory
 - 3. Personal behavior theory
 - 4. Miasma theory

1. Contagion theory

- This theory was common at the beginning of the 19th century. Most official disease prevention activities were based on the hypothesis that illness is contagious. It required:
 - Keeping sick people away from well people.
 - The institution of quarantine of ships (the traditional period was forty days la quarantine) during which time ships, their crews and cargos waited off shores or at some isolated islands.
 - Setting up military cordons around infected towns
 - Isolation of households if they were infected, and
 - Fumigating or washing the bedding and clothing of the sick.

Problems confounded the acceptance of this theory were

1. There were too many instances where people become ill regardless of their isolation from human contact and
2. Too many others where brave souls nursed the dying and carried their bodies to the graveyard yet remained well.

2. Supernatural theory

- Proponents of this theory argue that supernatural forces cause disease. Disease prevention measures based on this theory were important to the religious people.
- The view among them was that disease is a punishment for transgression of God's laws. Because epidemic took a great toll on the poor than the rich, the healthier rich can employ the super natural theory as a justification for berating for the poor for sinful behavior i.e. presumed idleness, intemperance and uncleanness.
- This theory expressed a political philosophy. People could not advocate the belief that sin causes disease without, at the same time, implicitly supporting the idea that government need to redress poverty.

3. Personal behavior theory

- This theory held that disease results from wrong personal behavior. It was democratic and ante authoritarian in intent since it gave responsibility to individuals to control their own lives.
- In this formulation the source of the disease was not tied up with the mysterious ways of God, instead people caused their own disease by living fully unhealthy.
- Hence, improper diet, lack of exercise, poor hygiene and emotional tension become the focus of preventive actions.
- This theory does not blame the poor for the illness and in many aspects; it was homage to middle-class life.

4. Miasma theory

- This theory argues that disease is caused by the odor of decaying of organic materials.
- It dates back to the Hippocratic idea that disease is related to climate.
- It contrasted sharply from the other three theories since it conceptually separated the source of the disease from the victim of the disease.

II – Twenty-century models

- Although economic and ideological considerations influenced the 19th century disease prevention policy, sound research determines policy today. The 20th century theory focuses on:

1. The Germ Theory
2. The Life Style Theory
3. The Environmental Theory
4. The Multi Causal Theory

1. The Germ Theory

- This theory rapidly over took other explanations of disease causations. It held the notion that microorganisms cause diseases and it is possible to control diseases using antibiotics and vaccines.
- There was criticism on this theory by Thomas Mckeown that stated as the incidence of all major infectious diseases begun to fall several decades before the introduction of vaccines and antibiotics.
- Thus rising of living standards was responsible for the reduction of disease not the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines.

2. The Life Style Theory

- This holds that unhealthy lifestyles are causes for diseases. This hypothesis blames stress, lack of exercise, the use of alcohol and tobacco improper nutrition for most chronic diseases.
- This theory rejects the notion central to the classic germ theory, that a single disease has a single etiology. Instead they emphasize the interrelatedness of many variables in disease causality, principally those under the control of the individual.
- Nevertheless, this approach resembles the germ theory, for it conceives of disease as an individual event, the difference is that prevention, instead of requiring physicians' ministrations, demand personal behavior change.
- The critics surrounding this theory state that the change for lifestyle requires overall social change

3. The Environmental Theory

- Environmental theory explains that significant number of chronic disease are caused by toxins in the environment and it implies that disease prevention, instead of requiring medical treatments or personal hygiene, demands change in the industrial production.
- The first aspect of the environmental hypothesis is occupational hazards, the second concentrates on toxic substances in the air water and soil (advocates of this theory places particular emphasis on radioactivity), and the third aspect focus on synthetic additives to foods “organic foods”.
- Two scientific disputes surround the hypothesis viz the suitability of extrapolating from animals to humans and the concept of threshold levels.

4. The Multi Causal Theory

- It is also called the web of disease causation. The theory express that there are multiple factors for a cause of a single disease entity.
- But it is incapable of directing a truly effective disease prevention policy as the theories it replaces.
- Its shortcomings are it gives few clues about how to prevent disease, the actual prevention policies it implies are inefficient in many ways and there is a gap between what it promises and what epidemiologist's deliver.

Health and Culture

Learning Objectives

- At the end of this module, the students are expected to:
 1. Define culture
 2. Describe the relationship between culture and health
 3. Discuss the influence of culture on health.

Definition

- Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morale, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.
- Culture refers to the sum total of the life- ways of a group of people who share values, beliefs and practices that are passed on from generation to generation and which change through time.
- Culture is the sum totals of the things that people do because of having been taught. For the perpetuation of human race, man depends on culture, which is a learned behavior.
- Culture is peculiar to human beings. It separates man and the society from that of animals and insects, whose behavior is always only instinctual and therefore does not change. Man's culture or learned behavior makes possible to change continuously.

The three suggested levels of culture include

- **Concrete** - the most visible tangible artifacts such as clothes, music, art, food and games. Festivals and celebration focus on these dimensions.
- **Behavioral** – practices reflect values and defined social and gender roles, languages spoken, and approaches to non-verbal communication. Behavioral aspects of culture include language, gender roles, family structure, political affiliation, and community organization.
- **Symbolic** – values and belief are often expressed in symbols and rituals. Although often abstract, symbolic meaning is key to how people define themselves in relation to each other, the world and the universe. Symbolic expression includes value systems, religion, worldview, customs, spirituality, morals and ethics.

Relation of Culture and Health

- Culture is one of the determinants of health among the environmental factors.
- An individual's culture influences his or her attitude toward various health issues, including perceptions of what is and is not a health problem, methods of disease prevention, treatment of illness, and use of health providers.
- In every culture, the care of the sick person is clearly dictated not only as to what care he/she is given, but also who will do it and how he/she should proceed.
- We learn from our own cultural and ethnic backgrounds how to be healthy, how to recognize illness, and how to be ill. Meanings attached to the notions of health and illnesses are related to basic, culture-bound values by which we define a given experience and perceptions.

Health and Culture

- People around the world have beliefs and behaviors related to health and illness that stem from cultural forces and individual experience and perceptions. To understand the cultural context of health, it is essential to work with several key concepts:

1. The concept of insider and outsider

- Perspectives are useful for examining when we are seeing things from our point of view and when we are trying to understand someone else's view of things. Insider shows the culture as viewed from within.

1. The concept of insider and outsider conts'.

- It refers to the meaning that people attach to things from their cultural perspective. For example, the view worms (ascaris) in children are normal and are caused by eating sweets in the perspective within some cultures.
- The outsider perspective refers to something as seen from the outside. Rather than meaning, it conveys a structural approach, or something as seen without understanding its meaning for a culture.
- It can also convey an outsider's meaning attached to the same phenomenon. For example, that ascaris is contracted through eggs ingested by contact with contaminated soil or foods contaminated by contact with that soil.

1. The concept of insider and outsider concepts''.

- The concept of insider and outsider perspective allows us to look at health, illness and prevention and treatment systems from several perspectives; to analyze the differences between these perspectives; and to develop approaches that will work within a cultural context.
- The insider-outsider concept leads to other sets of concepts.
- Disease in the insider, usually the western biomedical definition refers to an undesirable deviation from a measurable norm. Example deviation in temperature, white cell counts and many others are seen as indicators of disease.
- Illness on the other hand, means "not feeling well." thus, it is subjective, insider view.

1. The concept of insider and outsider conts'.

- This set ups some immediate dissonance between the two views.
- It is possible to have an undesirable deviation from a western biomedical norm and to feel fine.
- For example, hypertension, early stage of cancer. HIV infection and early stages of diabetes are all instances where people might feel well, in spite of having a disease.
- This means that health care providers to “fix” something that people may not realize are wrong. It is also possible for someone to feel ill and for the western biomedical system not to identify a disease.

2. Ethnocentrism

- Ethnocentrism refers to seeing one's own culture as "best".
- This is a natural tendency, because the survival and perpetuation of a culture depends on teaching children to accept it and on its members feeling that it is a good thing.
- Cultural relativism in anthropology refers to the idea that each culture has developed its own ways of solving problems of how to live together; how to obtain the essentials of life, such as food and shelter; how to explain phenomena; and so on.
- No one is "better" or "worse"; they are just different. This is a challenge, what if a behavior is "wrong" from an epidemiological perspective.

Ethnocentrism

- How does one distinguish between a 'dangerous' behavior (example, using HIV contaminated needle) and behavior that are merely different and therefore, seem odd?
- For example, Bolivian peasants use very fine clay in a drink believed to be good for digestion and stomach ailments. Health workers succeeded in discouraging this practice in some communities because 'eating dirt' seemed like a bad thing.
- The health workers then found themselves faced with increased caries (tooth decay) and other symptoms of calcium deficiency.

Ethnocentrism

- Upon analysis, the clay was a key source of calcium for these communities. Thus, there is a delicate balance between being judgmental without good reason and introducing behavior change because there is a real harm from existing behaviors.

THE END

DISCUSSION