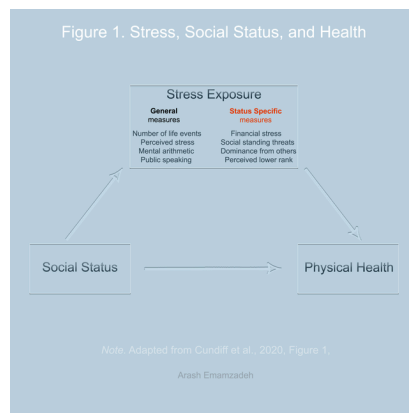


Mental Illness and Healthcare Issues

By: Quade Young

Mental illness is an increasingly prevalent issue in modern society. Providing such healthcare services to those affected by mental health disorders is a popular topic of discussion, especially in America. Looking at a sociological perspective allows us to be more focused on the relationship between societal factors, the stigmatization of mental illness, and the healthcare system. Throughout my research, I found interesting key information about mental illness and healthcare issues, stigmatization, and the structural challenges within the healthcare system.



Looking from a sociological perspective, my research emphasizes that mental health is not just based on an individual's thoughts or choices, but is more closely related to one's social life. According to an article written by Arash Emamzadeh, a genetics and psychology major, physical health and stress exposure is directly linked to social status. Having poor physical health adds stress and can affect one's socializing, therefore pushing an individual deeper into both social and physical issues. This, further affecting their social status and mental health. Compared to an otherwise socially healthy individual, someone who has a difficult time socializing or fitting in is more likely to battle mental illness due to the lack

of social relief or support provided by socialization.

(Psychology Today)

People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face greater stressors, limited access to mental healthcare services, eventually leading to higher risks of mental illness. Poverty plays a vital role in an individual's physical health due to the inability to get the proper healthcare they need. The 2019 National Health Interview Survey discovered that 8.5% of Americans have delayed or did not receive medical care. Physical or financial insecurity can affect social status and mental health in multiple ways, such as the struggle of finding transportation to get to the medical center or the inability to afford medication. This highlights the importance of mental health to someone's social position.

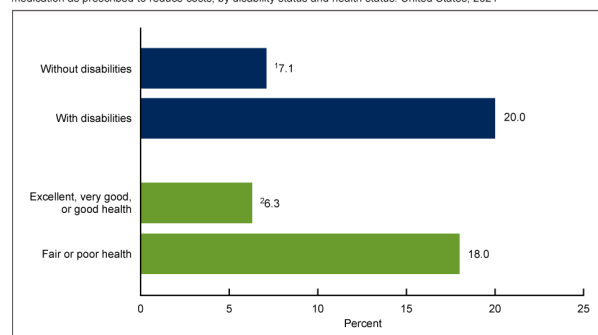
Unemployment is a key puzzle piece in the link between economic status and mental health. Financial stress arises from job loss, which in turn causes anxiety as a person starts to fear their ability to meet basic needs to support their families. This dilemma can lead to a loss of identity and purpose, resulting in the feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem. These feelings can steer an individual into a hole of social isolation, resulting in depression.

Stigmatization affects an individual's mental wellness significantly. The three types of stigma are Self-stigma, Public sigma and Structural stigma. Self-stigma, where those with mental illnesses internalize societal stereotypes, can lead the individual to have a lower self-esteem and therefore be reluctant to seek mental health care. Public stigma makes it difficult for individuals who have mental health issues to fit in socially or interact publicly with other people. This can impact their ability to find a job, to find a place to live, and to form healthy relationships. Lastly, Structural stigma is a stigma that is rooted in discriminatory institutional policies, which can result in an increase in mental health disparities. These institutional inequalities can impact outcomes within the healthcare system, the criminal justice system, and the educational institutions. Collectively, these forms of stigma have devastating sociological consequences for individuals dealing with mental illness.

The sociological perspective is vital when looking at the healthcare system's role in addressing mental health issues. There are many disparities when it comes to access to healthcare. According to the national study of medicine, a survey study indicated that a vast majority of the subjects (95.6%) stated that they struggled with at least one barrier to healthcare access. Immigrants are especially impacted by sociological factors, as the language barrier and diverse ethnic background can hinder the quality of care due to systemic biases and lack of trained professionals. These differences can also result in insurance limitations, which then further hinders the individual's ability to obtain appropriate care.

In addition to the above sociological impacts on healthcare, mentally ill and disabled people may also be victims of systemic biases and unfairness within the healthcare system. Medicalization,

Figure 2. Percentage of adults aged 18–64 who took prescription medication in the past 12 months and did not take medication as prescribed to reduce costs, by disability status and health status: United States, 2021



*Significantly different from adults with disabilities ($p < 0.05$).
 †Significantly different from adults in fair or poor health ($p < 0.05$).
 NOTES: Adults who did not take medication as prescribed were defined as those who reported taking prescription medications in the last 12 months (57.9% of adults aged 18–64 in 2021) and responded “yes” to at least one of the following: “During the last 12 months, were any of the following true for you: 1) Skipped medication doses to save money. 2) Took less medication to save money. 3) Delayed filling a prescription to save money.” Estimates are based on household interviews of a sample of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. Access data table for Figure 2 at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/datafiles/data70-tables.pdf#2>.
 SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey, 2021.

as defined by Wikipedia as “the process by which human conditions and problems come to be defined and treated as medical conditions, and thus become the subject of medical study, diagnosis, prevention, or treatment”, has become a growing problem within the healthcare field. Critics argue that the healthcare system medicalizes mental illness, characterizing it as a biological or individual issue. Due to this type of classification, social determinants are often overlooked. individuals are led to rely on medication to feel mentally healthy, rather than to apply a more holistic and therapeutic approach. Medicalization ultimately

causes those afflicted with mental illness to spend a lot of money on something that only partially fixes the problem, which in turn causes many financial problems and leads them down a deeper mental illness hole.

Examining the sociological standpoint of mental illness and healthcare issues, we discover that these two elements are profoundly interconnected. Recognizing the impact of social determinants, challenging stigmatization, and reforming the healthcare system to provide equitable access and quality care are crucial steps toward achieving a more mentally healthy society. Tackling the sociological effects on mental illness and associated health care needs to be a collective responsibility. Confronting this crisis communally will pave the way for a more supportive, inclusive, and compassionate healthcare system that is fair and accessible. By prioritizing the mental well-being of all individuals, a more unified and stable society can be achieved.

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