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**3-2 Activity: Critical Analysis: Engage**

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Critical Analysis: Mental Health Through the Social Science Lens

Mental health, as a critical component of wellness, significantly influences societal institutions, particularly healthcare, education, the economy, and community structures. By examining this issue through the Social Science lens, it becomes evident that addressing mental health challenges requires systemic reform and a reevaluation of societal priorities to create equitable solutions.

Healthcare systems are among the most profoundly affected institutions. Despite growing awareness, mental health services remain underfunded and inaccessible, particularly in low-income and rural areas (World Health Organization, n.d.). Gaps in funding, workforce distribution, and access to affordable care disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including those in rural communities. These disparities strain emergency and primary care systems, often forcing them to act as the primary providers of mental health care. Addressing these inequities requires increased funding, policy reforms, and a shift toward integrating mental health care with physical health services.

The economy is another institution significantly impacted by mental health. The World Economic Forum (2021) reports that mental health conditions like depression and anxiety cost the global economy over $1 trillion annually in lost productivity. These costs stem from absenteeism, presenteeism (working while unwell), and long-term disability. While workplace wellness programs have shown promise in addressing these challenges, access to such programs remains uneven, particularly for workers in lower-income or high-stress industries.

Analyzing mental health through the Social Science lens highlights the interconnected nature of societal structures and wellness. Addressing systemic inequities in mental health care access and prioritizing mental health alongside physical health are critical steps in fostering a more inclusive and resilient society. While progress has been made under recent administrations, the ongoing challenges demonstrate the need for sustained advocacy and reform.

In recent years, U.S. administrations have taken critical steps to address these issues. The Biden-Harris Administration implemented a historic final rule in 2024, ensuring that mental health care coverage for 175 million Americans is on par with physical health care. President Biden has emphasized that mental health care is health care, reinforcing the principle that health care is a right, not a privilege (The White House, 2024). This reform seeks to close the equity gap in mental health services and increase access for underserved populations.

During his presidency, Donald J. Trump also highlighted the mental health crisis, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump emphasized the need to meet the mental health needs of struggling Americans, stating, “At a time when many Americans are experiencing increased stress, anxiety, and personal loss, we must also ensure that our country can meet the mental health needs of those struggling in this crisis.” His administration focused on suicide prevention efforts, increased funding for mental health services, and initiatives to support vulnerable groups, including veterans, minorities, and children.

In conclusion, mental health is a cornerstone of wellness, deeply influencing healthcare, education, and economic productivity. Through the Social Science lens, addressing systemic challenges such as inequitable access, stigma, and underfunding emerges as essential for creating an inclusive and resilient society. Practical reforms, such as expanding telehealth in underserved areas, integrating mental health education in schools, and ensuring parity in mental health coverage, are crucial steps toward achieving this goal. By prioritizing mental health alongside physical health, policymakers can foster a society where individuals and institutions alike can thrive.

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