

## CHAPTER 5

### SOCIAL CAUSES OF HEALTH AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

#### Learning Questions

1. What is a fundamental cause of disease?
2. What is meant by health disparities?
3. How and why does social class influence health and disease?
4. How and why do race and ethnicity influence health and disease?
5. Why do women have worse health overall than men?
6. Why does religiosity promote better health?

#### Chapter Outline

- I. Learning Questions
- II. Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease
- III. Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Health Inequalities
  - A. Social Class
  - B. Race and Ethnicity
  - C. Gender and Sex
  - D. Age
  - E. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- IV. Other Social Causes of Health and Health Problems
  - A. Social Stress
  - B. Social Relationships and Social Support
  - C. Religion
  - D. Neighborhood Living Conditions
  - E. Environmental Pollution and Hazards
  - F. Unsafe Products and Workplaces
  - G. Interpersonal Violence and Handgun Violence
- V. Conclusion
- VI. Summary
- VII. Giving It Some Thought

#### Key Terms

**Acculturation:** adoption by immigrants of the American culture and lifestyle

**Concentrated disadvantage:** the combination in urban neighborhoods of problems such as extreme poverty, high unemployment, high crime rates, dilapidated housing, substandard schools, abandoned buildings, inadequate public funding, environmental hazards, weak social ties and mutual trust among neighbors, and much graffiti and vandalism

**Cumulative disadvantage:** the accumulation over the life course of the impact of stress and other childhood problems

**Environmental inequality:** the disproportionate impact of environmental problems on the health of people with low socioeconomic status and on people of color

**Environmental racism:** the disproportionate impact of environmental problems on people of color

**Fundamental cause:** a social condition that influences the likelihood of many diseases, that does so for many reasons, that involves access to resources regarding health, and that has effects on health persisting over time even though intervening mechanisms may change

**Gender paradox:** the fact that women outlive men but have worse health overall than men

**Health disparities:** another term for health inequalities

**Health inequalities:** differences in health and disease that reflect inequalities in the larger society

**Hispanic paradox:** another term for the Latino paradox

**Latino paradox:** the idea that Latinos have better health overall than would be expected from their lower socioeconomic status

**Male privilege:** the everyday advantages enjoyed by men simply because they are male

**Morbidity:** the incidence of disease

**Reproductive injustice:** the fact that women who are poor and /or African American, Latino, or Native American are more likely to experience reproductive problems

**Selectivity:** in regard to the Latino paradox, the idea that this paradox is partly explained by the fact that healthier Mexicans enter the United States and less healthy Mexicans return to Mexico

**Stress:** emotional and mental tension resulting from very adverse circumstances or situations

**Stress buffers:** certain factors that can reduce the impact of stress

**Stress proliferation:** the idea that one stressor may lead to additional stressors

**Successful aging:** living a long and healthy life free or relatively free of health problems

**Theory of fundamental causes:** the idea that a social condition underlies multiple diseases for multiple reasons, that addressing any one reason for disease still permits the condition to induce other diseases, and that when a new disease arises or returns, the social condition will make vulnerable the same kind of people it makes vulnerable for other diseases

**Toxic stress:** childhood stress that is frequent, severe, and prolonged

### “Giving It Some Thought”

You are living in a large city with your spouse and two young children. You enjoy your urban living, but you also recognize that all the traffic in your neighborhood and throughout the city must be polluting the air and causing a health hazard. You’re becoming increasingly worried about the possible health effects for your family and especially for your children. Your spouse is much less concerned and thinks you are worrying too much. Do you try to persuade your spouse to move out of the city, or do you decide not to press the issue?

### Online Resources

1. The Huffington Post  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racist-roots-of-flints-water-crisis\\_us\\_56b12953e4b04f9b57d7b118](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racist-roots-of-flints-water-crisis_us_56b12953e4b04f9b57d7b118)  
How does the Flint, Michigan water crisis reflect environmental racism? What impact may this event have on Michigan families and on American families?
2. Scorecard: The Pollution Information Site  
[http://scorecard.goodguide.com/env-releases/def/ej\\_evidence.html](http://scorecard.goodguide.com/env-releases/def/ej_evidence.html)  
Look at the links on the far left of the screen. What type of impact can various types of pollution have on different racial and ethnic groups? What would medical sociologists say about this pollution?
3. Center for Reproductive Rights  
<https://www.reproductiverights.org/document/reproductive-injustice-racial-and-gender-discrimination-in-us-health-care>  
Download the most recent edition of this publication. How do the topics covered in the publication compare with Chapter 5 in your textbook? Have you ever been a victim of reproductive injustice?
4. BBC News  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32910129>  
Why is the health of Latinos better? Why is it a paradox? What social factors can explain this phenomenon?