



How Do Economic Disparities Lead to Health Inequalities?

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

An individual's well-being, comprising physical, mental and social factors is referred to as 'health', and is also considered a social indicator and public value. Health inequalities, as defined by the WHO are differences in the acquisition of health determinants arising from the social conditions in which people exist (1). Social causation, which includes poverty, unhealthy environment, discrimination, lack of opportunity for healthy lifestyles, and limited access to education and health services, can explain the existence of health inequality (2).

Life expectancy is a measure of good health, and it varies by country due to various factors such as the structure of health services, environmental conditions, and living standards. It is evident that people in developed countries live longer than those in less-developed countries. However, a high Gross Domestic Product does not necessarily guarantee better health for residents. Greater income gaps between social strata lead to more significant social and health inequalities, according to Marmot (3). Income inequality is associated with more widespread obesity, violence, and mental illness. The fierce struggle to achieve high status may lead to prolonged stress, resulting in health problems. According to Gonchev (4), low economic growth and socio-economic inequality can lead to poor health for people with low in-

comes. They may live in poor sanitary and hygienic conditions, have no money for quality food or additional health services, have limited access to medical facilities, due to limited means of transport, and have low education and health culture. People with lower incomes living in worse economic conditions may find themselves excluded from access to quality health care due to a lack of health insurance, difficult access to paid medical services that are not paid by the health fund, or insufficient funding of health facilities in the affected areas.

People on lower incomes often live in poorer living conditions, including poor quality housing, solid fuel heating, poor food, and limited access to sports and recreational activities. This can lead to a higher risk of various diseases such as respiratory, infectious or mental. Poverty can negatively impact mental health, leading to increased rates of depression and anxiety. Sun (5) concluded that parenting is a major factor that causes depression and anxiety among children. Poor parents with depressed or anxious symptoms also increase the risk of mental disorders for their children.

Poverty can negatively impact cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes, especially in children. It may disrupt healthy cognitive development leading to long-term consequences due to learned helplessness, unhealthy attach-



ments, and punitive parenting behavior (6). Education is a vital determinant of health. Limited opportunities for education, low literacy and health culture hinder the understanding of the importance of prevention and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Economic inequalities can affect access to healthy food and lead to stress and strain for people on lower incomes. This can harm mental well-being and increase risky behaviors such as smoking, drug use, and alcoholism, which lead to various health problems. Economic inequalities can also affect health through working conditions. Often, people with a lower socioeconomic status work in unfavorable conditions - outdoors, perform heavy physical labor or are exposed to harmful substances. This can lead to occupational accidents, occupational diseases, or chronic conditions, hence deepening health inequalities. According to Chengelova and Todorova (7), poverty is the leading cause of impaired human health among Bulgarians, generating a series of inequalities, including inequality in access to health services and care within the healthcare system.

Economic inequalities can lead to health inequalities through multiple factors such as limited access to health care, poor living conditions, unhealthy lifestyles, working environment, and low levels of education. Reducing social and economic inequality would lead to a reduction in health inequality. Equal access to education, employment, and adequate housing, assistance to low-income people, the homeless and refugees, the development of health care infrastructure, the expansion of medical insurance, and the reduc-

tion of health care costs are all ways to overcome health inequalities.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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