



NMNEC Concept: **Health Disparities**

Mega-Concept: Participant Attribute

Category: Diversity

Concept Name: Health Disparities

Concept Definition:

“A particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health.” (Healthy People, 2014b).

Expanding on this definition, Healthy People states “If a health outcome is seen in a greater or lesser extent between populations, there is disparity” (Healthy People, 2014b). In addition, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines health disparities as “differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States” (2017, “What Are ‘Health Disparities’” section).

Scope:

"Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial or ethnic group; religion; socioeconomic status; gender; age; mental health; cognitive, sensory, or physical disability; sexual orientation or gender identity; geographic location; or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion."(Healthy People, 2014b),

Health disparities can impact all aspects of life including interpersonal relationships, religious practice, racial and ethnic identity. The cause of disparities seen in vulnerable populations may also include income, health insurance coverage, exposure to environmental hazards, and education.

Attributes and Criteria:

Population-specific differences in health and disease, health outcomes, or access to care that place some populations at greater risk than others for a lower level of health and wellness than others. Vulnerable populations who are oppressed, marginalized, disenfranchised, or underserved are most at risk.



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- Disparities in Health: Genetic and environmental differences in Individual health outcomes.
- Disparities in Access to Care: Differences in health literacy including gaining entry into the health care system; reasonable access to clinical sites; and finding regular providers a client can build trust with and communicate their individual needs.
- Disparities in Health Care: Differences in health coverage and the quality of care received by racial or ethnic minorities versus non-Hispanic whites. Economic disparities also affect health coverage and the quality of care.
- Social disadvantage:
 - Refers to the “unfavorable social, economic, or political conditions that some groups of people systematically experience based on their relative position in social hierarchies” (Braveman et al., 2011).
 - Reflected, for example, by low levels of wealth, income, education, or occupational rank, or by less representation at high levels of political office (Braveman et al., 2011).
 - It results in a restricted ability to participate fully in society and enjoy the benefits of progress
 - It is important to note that not all members of a disadvantaged group will necessarily be disadvantaged, and not all socially disadvantaged groups will necessarily manifest measurable adverse health consequences.
- Health equity: “Attainment of the highest level of health for all people” (Healthy People, 2014b). Healthy People 2030 priorities continue to focus on health equity with the Foundational Principle of “Achieving health and well-being requires eliminating health disparities, achieving health equity, and attaining health literacy.” (Healthy People, 2014b)

Theoretical Links:

- Social Determinants of Health: The Whitehall Studies with Sir Michael Marmot, epidemiologist.
 - The original Whitehall Study investigated social determinants of health, focusing on the prevalence and mortality rates of cardiorespiratory disease among British male civil servants conducted from 1967-77. More than 500 research projects have referenced this data for health disparity studies (University College London (UCL), Institute of Epidemiology & Health Care, 2020).
- Social Ecology Model of Health Promotion: Daniel Stokols, PhD, School of Social Ecology, UC Irvine, CA. The social ecology models of health promotion were developed in several different disciplines. Ecology refers to “the study of relationships between organisms and their environments”. The model developed in the early seventies and continues today focusing on:
 - Multiple physical, social and cultural dimensions that affect health outcomes



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- Cumulative impact such dimensions have on an individual's wellbeing over a specified time frame
- Incorporated systems theory looking at personal attributes and environment (Stokols, 1992)
- **Health Disparities Research Framework:** Provides a model to help define vulnerable populations using potential determinants of health disparities from the perspective of health services researchers, including individual, provider, and health care system factors. Understanding and addressing health disparities in all of their complexity and promoting health equity requires applying a multidimensional research lens. The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) research framework is a tool for conceptualizing and depicting the wide array of determinants that promote or worsen minority health or cause, sustain, or reduce health disparities. These determinants may reflect etiological factors related to health outcomes as well as intervention targets to improve minority health or reduce disparities. NIMHD considers the framework to be a work in progress and may change it in response to changes in research conceptualizations or terminology as well as feedback from the extramural community and other stakeholders. (Alvidrez et al., 2019).

Context to Nursing/Healthcare:

- **Health care disparities**
 - Eliminating (no longer 'decreasing') health disparities is a Healthy People overarching goal.
 - Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health.
 - Historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.
 - Healthy People has identified multiple factors that influence the individual or populations as "determinants of health", including:
 - High-quality education
 - Nutritious food
 - Decent and safe housing
 - Affordable, reliable public transportation
 - Culturally sensitive health care providers
 - Clean water and unpolluted air(Healthy People, 2014a, "About Determinants of Health section)
- **Competency in Nursing**
 - Health disparities are a foundational concept for community and population health nursing.



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- A broad based education is needed to produce the culturally sensitive health care providers defined by Healthy People 2020.
- Knowledge: Principles/tools for assessing and measuring health disparities for communities and populations. Incorporating political knowledge that affects health care access into the nursing plan of care.
- Skills: Ability to use epidemiological tools to assess and measure health disparities; ability to plan and implement dual macro and micro strategies and interventions to reduce the burden of disease/risk factors to reduce and eventually eliminate health disparities.
- Attitudes: personal and professional commitment to contribute towards the goal of eliminating health disparities.

Interrelated Concepts:

- **Health Care Delivery Systems:** Have not provided sufficient services to eliminate health disparities
- **Health Care Economics:** The cost of health care has escalated with the wealthy getting health care on demand
- **Health Policy:** Affects macro and micro decision making impacting disparities in delivery
- **Ethics:** Distributive justice
- **Patient Education:** Health literacy
- **Advocacy:** Those who can should help those who don't have the knowledge
- **Spirituality:** Can be a source of prejudice and restriction of health care
- **Culture:** Political motivations can limit access to select ethnicities/cultures

New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium (NMNEC) Required Exemplars:

- Social Determinants of Health
- New Mexico Health Disparities
- United States and Global Health Disparities
- Health Disparities in Local Community
- Social Justice/Health Care Equity



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Resources:

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). (2018). 2018 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report.

<https://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqdr18/index.html>



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