

Perspective

Understanding global health sociology: Examining health and society on a global scale

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INTRODUCTION

Global health sociology is a multidisciplinary field that examines the complex interplay between health and society at a global level. It delves into the social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors that shape health outcomes and access to healthcare across different countries and populations. The field of global health sociology seeks to understand and address health disparities, inequalities, and the social determinants of health that affect individuals and communities worldwide.

The origins of global health sociology can be traced back to the mid-20th century when scholars began to recognize the impact of social factors on health. During this period, ground-breaking research emerged that highlighted the influence of socio-economic conditions on disease patterns and health outcomes. The famous Whitehall studies conducted in the United Kingdom by Michael Marmot and colleagues demonstrated a strong link between social status and health, revealing that individuals in lower social positions experienced higher mortality rates and poorer health compared to those in higher positions. In the 21st century, global health sociology gained momentum as the world faced an increasing number of global health challenges such as infectious disease outbreaks, health disparities, and the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. The field became more interdisciplinary, incorporating insights from sociology, anthropology, public health, political science, and economics to understand the complex interactions between health and society on a global scale.

DESCRIPTION

Social determinants of health

One of the central concepts in global health sociology is

the understanding of social determinants of health. These are the conditions in which people are born, live, work, and age, and wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. Social determinants include factors such as access to education, employment opportunities, income distribution, housing conditions, healthcare services, and the broader socio-political context.

In many parts of the world, health inequalities are deeply rooted in social disparities. For instance, individuals from marginalized communities often face higher risks of illness and reduced access to quality healthcare. Global health sociology seeks to identify these inequities and advocate for policies that address the underlying social determinants to improve health outcomes for all populations.

Global health inequalities

Global health sociology acknowledges that health inequalities are not solely confined within national borders but also extend across regions and countries. Low- and middle-income countries often experience a disproportionate burden of disease and face challenges in accessing adequate healthcare services. Infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis continue to impact vulnerable populations in developing countries. Furthermore, globalization has brought about a host of new health challenges.

Issues such as the international spread of diseases, health workforce migration, and the impact of global trade and economic policies on health have become prominent concerns in the field of global health sociology. Understanding the complexities of these issues requires a comprehensive approach that examines the interconnections between local and global factors.

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Healthcare systems and policies

Global health sociology also investigates the diversity of healthcare systems and policies around the world. Different countries have varying approaches to healthcare delivery, financing, and governance. These systems are influenced by historical, cultural, political, and economic factors. Some nations have publicly funded and universally accessible healthcare, while others rely heavily on private healthcare systems.

Global health sociology helps us understand the strengths and weaknesses of different healthcare models, allowing policymakers and stakeholders to learn from successful practices and avoid the pitfalls of ineffective systems. Additionally, it advocates for policies that promote health as a human right and seek to reduce health disparities across nations.

Global health governance and organizations

The governance of global health involves a complex web of International Organizations, governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and private sector entities working collaboratively to address global health challenges. Global health sociology examines the roles and interactions of these stakeholders in shaping health policies, funding health programs, and responding to health emergencies.

Organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation play critical roles in global health initiatives. However, global health sociology also acknowledges the potential challenges associated with power imbalances, political interests, and resource distribution among these entities, which can affect the equitable distribution of health interventions and resources.

CONCLUSION

When implementing global health interventions, it is essential to consider the ethical implications of these actions. Global health sociology emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions that respect the autonomy and agency of local communities. Ethical considerations also involve transparency, accountability, and the avoidance of neo-colonial practices in global health work.

Community engagement and participatory approaches are increasingly recognized as crucial components of successful global health interventions. Empowering communities to take an active role in shaping their health outcomes can lead to more sustainable and effective health improvements.