

A Sociological Approach *to* Health Determinants

A Sociological Approach to Health Determinants investigates how 'the social' works in determining health and health inequity. Taking a global perspective, the book shines a light on how experiences of health, illness and health care are shaped by a variety of complex social dynamics.

Informed primarily by sociology, the book engages with the WHO's social determinants of health approach and draws on contributions from history, political economy and policy analysis to examine issues such as class, gender, ethnicity and indigeneity, and the impact they have on health.

A Sociological Approach to Health Determinants is a comprehensive resource that provides a new perspective on the influence of social structures on health, and how our understanding of the social can ensure improved health outcomes for people all over the globe.

Additional resources for instructors are available online at www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/socialdeterminants

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Foreword

‘To good health!’ we say when sharing a drink. Sadly, all too often that good health is not shared. Many people do not enjoy the conditions needed to live healthy lives.

Health authorities around the world now recognise the social determinants of health as a major concern. That is an important advance. Recognising a problem, however, and understanding it, are different things. And doing something effective about it is another matter again.

In this book Toni Schofield and her colleagues move us towards understanding and action. They give the facts about health and society, mapping the realities of class, gender, ethnicity, indigeneity, the state and health care. The facts are tough. There is grim evidence here about violence, abuse and exclusion; and about the less-dramatic, grinding effects of poverty and stress.

The book does much more. It takes us beyond describing the social dimensions of health to the ‘causes of the causes’ – the social *dynamics* of health. The chapters consider carefully the major structures of inequality in contemporary societies, explaining how they operate and how they have changed. They place health in the context of economic change, colonisation, migration and changing reproductive practices.

How do social inequalities get under the skin and become health effects? That’s a key question, and in this book we see the multiple answers. They range from socially caused malnutrition, to social pathways of viral infection, to physical injury in the workplace, to genetic damage and environmental pollution. All are bound up in the operations of social power. All have an impact on bodies, but unequally so.

This book combines contemporary social analysis, a rich assembly of evidence about health in social contexts and illuminating vignettes of lives and situations. It is both accessible and intelligent. It has humour, detail and global sweep, inviting us to think about society and health where we live, and on a world scale.

The authors deal with issues that matter, and do not pull punches. They explore the ways in which business-friendly governments, bent on expanding the power of the market and opportunities for profit, may now be undermining past gains in community health. They explore the long-term effects of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples as well as the historic trauma. Without being pompous, this is a morally serious book.

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There is vital information for health professionals and educators, here. The social determinants of health are now an established issue in health policy; and this book shows how practitioners can understand that issue.

It is also of wider interest. The issues discussed here are large contemporary questions of social justice and our collective well-being. Any citizen concerned with the state of our world can learn from this book, and learn things that matter.

Raewyn Connell
Professor Emerita
The University of Sydney
April 2014

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