



Humans are basically allergic to socio-economic stratification; Why & How?

Mr. Veereshkumar Topalakatti

Vice-Principal, Department of Community Health Nursing, Kushma College of Nursing,
Hubballi, Karnataka, India.

Article Information:

Type of Article: *Short Review Article*

Received On: *8th June 2024*

Accepted On: *17th June 2024*

Published On: *19th June 2024*

Abstract:

Humans are inherently sensitive to socio-economic stratification, which creates profoundly negative effects on mental and physical health. This paper explores how economic inequality induces high psychosocial stress, leading to chronic inflammation, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and mental health disorders. The stress of relative poverty, characterized by social insecurity and low self-worth, triggers an allostatic overload, preventing the body from returning to a balanced state and causing rapid deterioration. Socio-economic disparities contribute significantly to violence, child abuse, lower IQ, poor educational outcomes, and decreased overall lifespan. The evidence suggests that inequality is a severe social pollutant with no justifiable basis for its perpetuation, underscoring the urgent need to address economic disparities for improved public health.

Keywords: Socio-economic stratification, psychosocial stress, relative poverty, allostatic overload, public health, inequality, mental health, chronic diseases, violence, child abuse

Introduction:

Human Biology and Social Response:

Humans are not designed to exist in an economically stratified society. Stratified society is far more unhealthy and unstable when compared to an egalitarian one. Consider our biology, specifically the human brain. We are profoundly wired for social response. For instance the same brain centers that react to physical pain also react to emotional pain, such as feeling rejected, excluded or shamed. In early life socially isolated infants, not receiving proper affection will fail to produce critical growth hormones,



Glorious International Journal of Nursing Research

(An International Peer-Reviewed Refereed Journal)

ISSN: 2583-9713

www.gloriousjournal.com

harming development. While in adulthood similar effects occur. For example, there are these dehumanizing institutions called prisons and they practice solitary confinement, severe social isolation, and that practice literally cause brain damage.

Now what do these examples have in common? They are negative responses to social related stress. And when you review the past 200 years of epidemiological study on the issue, you realize that an economically stratified society is one of the most toxically stressful conditions you could ever impose upon human species.

Toxic Stress of Economic Stratification:

We have all learn about the horrors of abject poverty. A condition that is affecting a billion people in 20th century causing literally millions of deaths each year. But the negative effects of economic stratification aren't limited to the distinctly poor. Inequality harms everyone. A kind of social pollution and the lower one finds themselves on the stratified ladder the worst their health becomes on average.

Consider a lower class mother working two jobs in debt, can't offer a car, living paycheck to paycheck while trying to take care of her young child. They may not be homeless, starving or even poor by legal standards, but every day is still a battle to survive. This is known as relative poverty or more formally low socioeconomic status. And a defining characteristic of this condition on average is high psychosocial stress, meaning of stress related to social factors. This stress includes not only feelings of general insecurity, such as worrying about paying your bills, affording your child's next doctor visit, or losing your job but also the stress of social status itself. How one feels about themselves compared to others. And while that particular aspect may seem trivial, the fact is our brains have evolved to react in profoundly specific ways when it comes to how we think others see us. We have an acute sensitivity to our perceived social status.

In other words it's not just about the stress of endless worry and the technical difficulty of being poor & that is toxic. It is equally if not more about the stress of feeling poor. For example, studies have shown if you take people with the same equal access to free healthcare, controlling for lifestyle factors, you will still see, as you inch down the ladder of income and wealth, people's health getting progressively worse on average. The lower they are in the class hierarchy, the sicker they become.

Health Implications of Low Socioeconomic Status:

One mechanism for this is that high psychological stress leads to a state of chronic inflammation and what's called an allostatic overload. Allostasis means your body's trying to recover from something



Glorious International Journal of Nursing Research

(An International Peer-Reviewed Refereed Journal)

ISSN: 2583-9713

www.gloriousjournal.com

working to return to a more balanced state. But it can't. And this causes the body and the mind to wear down rapidly. Living in relative poverty in all its day-to-day insecurity and feelings of low self-worth, keeps people psychologically locked in a stressful state. Ravaging mental and physical health.

Consider heart disease. Low socioeconomic status creates a 50% greater chance of its development. And not just because people may have poor lifestyle habits, but due to psychosocial stress itself, which increases the hormone cortisol damaging arteries fostering strokes and heart attacks. Low socioeconomic status is a heart disease risk factor on its own, similar for diabetes and cancer with far higher rates for those relatively poor. As one study put it, "Poverty itself is a Carcinogen"

And given that heart disease, diabetes and cancer were some of the leading causes of death in that highly unequal global society of the early 20th century these facts helps to explain why life span gaps between the rich and the poor were shockingly wide. Ranging from 15 to 40 years depending on region.

Mental Health and Social Inequality:

And then we have mental health. Low socioeconomic status fuels much higher instances of depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, suicide not to mention violence, including child abuse. The condition of poverty was found to be the leading predictor of child abuse which is particularly troubling since such abuse often leads to adult disorders such as addictions, anti social behavior, immune system problems, cognitive impairment. In fact, it was found that children simply living in the condition of poverty correlated to large decreases in IQ, decrease brain development and worse overall health throughout the life cycle. If child abuse is about negligence and harm any society that tolerates the existence of poverty, when it has the means to end it, is a society that is fundamentally abusive to children.

Violence and Inequality

Now as far as behavioral violence is considered, the emotional pathogen behind most acts of violence is shame and inequality & it produces shame like a finely tuned machine. Shootings, gang violence, terrorism, domestic violence, all highly correlated to inequality, like a toxic cloud hovering over civilization. The more economically unequal a society, the more violent it tend to be on average. And that goes for most everything in terms of negative public health outcomes.

Conclusion & Summary:

With higher incidences of disease, crime, obesity, infant mortality, homicides, mental illness, poor education, conflict, domestic abuse, illiteracy, suicide, premature mortality, overall mistrust and much



Glorious International Journal of Nursing Research

(An International Peer-Reviewed Refereed Journal)

ISSN: 2583-9713

www.gloriousjournal.com

more. There is no viable defense of its existence on any level and it's certainly not representative of a fixed human nature. Humans are basically allergic to socio-economic stratification

References:

1. Young SN. The neurobiology of human social behaviour: an important but neglected topic. *J Psychiatry Neurosci*. 2008;33(5):391-2.
2. Rivera, L. (2008). *Laboring to learn: Women's literacy and poverty in the post-welfare era*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
3. Rostow, W. W. (1990). *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
4. Sluiter, L. (2009). *Clean clothes: A global movement to end sweatshops*. New York, NY: Pluto Press.
5. United Nations Children's Fund. (2006). *Progress for children: A report card on nutrition*. New York, NY: Author.
6. United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *Human development report 2009*. New York, NY: Author.
7. Blitstein, R. (2009). Weathering the storm. *Miller-McCune*, 2(July–August), 48–57.
8. Dikhanov, Y. (2005). *Trends in global income distribution, 1970–2000, and scenarios for 2015*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.