

Attacking health inequities among low-income workers – both at home and on the job

Promoting integrated approaches to reducing health inequities among low-income workers: Applying a social ecological framework

Sherry Baron, Sharon Beard, Letitia K. Davis, Linda Delp, Linda Forst, Andrea Kidd-Taylor, Amy K. Liebman, Laura Linnan, Laura Punnett, Laura S. Welch. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, May 2014.

Overview

In 2010, one of every three workers in the United States earned a weekly salary below \$440 (1.5 times the minimum wage for a 40-hour week). Low-income populations have a lower life expectancy and greater rates of chronic diseases compared to those with higher incomes. Low-income workers face hazards in their workplaces and also in their communities, but most public health initiatives target a single level of the worker's social ecology: individual choices, intrapersonal relationships, institutions (such as the workplace), the influence of community and society, or the public policy environment. Developing integrated public health programs that address these combined health hazards, especially the interaction of occupational and non-occupational risk factors, can promote greater health equity. Using a "social ecological framework" (SEF), the authors review some public health initiatives breaking these silos open and offer recommendations for future practice.

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See abstract:

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Key Findings

- Clinics, community-based organizations, and government agencies can improve our understanding of health inequities faced by low-wage workers by better integrating work-related factors into their data collection.
- Community health centers should integrate work environmental factors into care.
- Mutual exchange of information and experience among public health disciplines and programs is key to improving coordinated efforts that address worker health across different social spheres.
- New models to provide practicing health care providers with occupational health information and links to occupational health resources need to be explored.
- Worker participation is essential to build effective and sustainable programs.
- Innovative demonstration projects that are multidisciplinary and community-based will build the scientific basis for sustainable programs and effective policy development.



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