Theories and Concepts in Public Health

Part One

Introduction to Theory

- What is theory?
  - "A systematic way of understanding events or situations" (Rimer & Glanz, 2005, p. 4)

- Why is it important?
  - Provides an understanding of health and the factors that influence health and health behaviors
  - Used to guide why people behave in a specific way, what we should know, and what should be done to change human behavior

Introduction to Theory

- Concepts
  - Primary elements of a theory
- Constructs
  - Key concepts of a given theory
- Variables
  - The operational forms of constructs
- Models
  - Often draw on a number of theories to help understand a particular problem

Introduction to Theory

Explanatory theory vs Change theory

- Explanatory Theory
  - Describe the reasons why a problem exist
  - Search for factors that contribute to a problem
- Change Theory
  - Guides the development of health interventions
  - Explains how to change health behaviors
  - Involves assumptions

Ecological perspective of health

- Background
  - Derived from general systems theory which views phenomena as open systems composed of mutually interacting components (Coreil, Bryant, & Henderson, 2001)
  - Bronfenbrenner’s framework (White, 2002)
    - Microsystem: individual role and relations
    - Mesosystem: interrelations between two or more settings
    - Exosystem: external setting that does not include the person
    - Macrosystem: culture
Ecological perspective of health

- **Background cont.**
  - Health is a product of an interdependent relationship between the individual and subsystems of the ecosystem such as family, community, culture, and physical and social environment (Green, 1991).

Ecological Perspective of Health

- **Contextual**
  - Physical environment
  - Social environment
  - Health care
  - Organisational, institutional
  - Economic resources
  - Societal, political

- **Individual-level**
  - Sociodemographics - age, race, ethnicity, education, income
  - Psychosocial - compliance, coping
  - Lifestyle - exercise, diet, alcohol, smoking, sexual behavior, illicit drug use
  - Psychological - beliefs, attitudes, personality

Health disparities

**Example**
- 20 year old man who does not exercise
  - **Intrapersonal level**: believes exercise is not important
  - **Interpersonal level**: no friend/family member to exercise with
  - **Community level**: institutional factors: on-campus rec center hours not conducive to school schedule
  - **Community factors**: social norms do not support exercise
  - **Public policy**: no policies to incentivize activity
  - What is an example from your own life?

**Key concepts (Rimer and Glanz, 2005)**
- Health behavior both affects and is affected by **multiple levels of influence**
- Individual behavior both shapes, and is shaped by the social environment (Reciprocal causation).

Application of Social Ecological Model

  - **Individual factors**: Victimization history, alcohol and drug use, depressed mood, and worries
  - **Interpersonal factors**: Parental divorce, parental monitoring, and parental support
  - **Community factors**: neighborhood monitoring, neighborhood support, school attachment, and social responsibility
Ecological perspective of health

- Principles of Ecological perspective on health behavior change
  1. Multiple levels of factors influence health behaviors.
  2. Influences interact across levels.
  3. Multi-level interventions should be most effective in changing behavior.
  4. Ecological models are most powerful when they are behavior-specific.

Resources