

Foundations of Global Health

Culture and Health

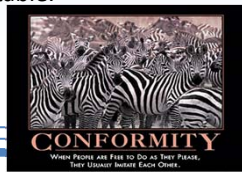


Learning Objectives

- Define culture
- Describe the most important relationships between culture and health
- Outline theories of how behavior change occurs in health
- Describe key measures to promote behavior change for better health
- Discuss the importance of social assessments

Definition of Culture

- “A set of rules or standards shared by members of a society, which when acted upon by the members, produces behavior that falls within a range of variation the members consider proper and acceptable.”



How we view cultures

- As an insider
- As an outsider
 - Ethnocentrism: seeing other cultures as inferior to your own
 - Cultural Relativism: evaluating a culture based on that culture's values and standards.



Health vs. Culture

- Female Circumcision – “Female Genital Mutilation”
- Cultural
 - Part of raising a girl properly
 - Ensures premarital virginity and marital fidelity
- Health
 - No positive health benefits
 - Health consequences: infertility, urinary tract infections, and childbirth complications.



Perceptions of Disease

- **Disease:** “the malfunctioning or mal- adaptation of biologic and psycho-physiologic processes in the individual.”
- **Illness:** “personal, interpersonal, and cultural reactions to disease and discomfort.”



Perceptions of Illness

- Vary across cultural groups
- Normal vs. affliction
 - Malaria: Sub-Saharan Africa, normal
 - Schistosomiasis: Egypt, normal
 - Referred to as “male menstruation”

Schistosoma parasitic worms (immediate right) can cause severe damage to the urinary tract, where the parasite deposits eggs and generates an overactive granulomatous immune response. These calcify over time shown in the x-ray (far right).



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Perceptions (Cont)

- Western medicine
 - Science based
- Other cultures
 - Illness is caused by “other” factors
 - Body being out of balance: hot vs. cold. (Chinese)
 - Supernatural: witch craft, gods, ancestors (Nigeria)
 - Emotional stresses: frightened (Hmong)



Folk Illness

- Local cultural interpretations of physical states that people perceive as illness
 - Empacho (Latin American Culture): food gets stuck in the walls of your stomach or intestines.
 - Inappropriate food practices
 - Causes bloating, diarrhea, and stomachache
 - Treatment = food restrictions, massage, consult a healer, and powders.

Prevention of Illness

- Pregnancy **taboos** in Nigeria
 - Sweet foods, so the baby would not be weak
 - Eggs, so the baby would not grow up to be a thief
 - Snails, so the baby would not be dull, salivate excessively, or not develop speech properly.



Prevention of Illness

- Ritual practices
 - Exorcism of evil spirits
 - Use of charms, amulets, and potions



Treatment

- Home remedies
- Local Healer
- Indigenous medicines
- “Western Doctor”
 - Often a last resort
- Are we different?



Determinants of Services

- Health care Services
 - Cost
 - Payment
 - Local provider (culturally similar)









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Health Behaviors

- Low birth weight of children
 - Biggest risk factor for premature death
 - Can come from food taboos during pregnancy
 - India: legumes
- Breastfeeding
- Undernutrition


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Improving Health Behaviors

- There are 4 major theories of health behavior
 - The Ecological Perspective
 - The Health Belief Model
 - Stages of Change Model
 - The Diffusion of Innovations Model

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The Ecological Perspective

- “Health related behaviors are affected by, and affect, multiple levels of influence: intrapersonal or individual factors, interpersonal factors, institutional factors and public policy.”




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The Ecological Model

• Individual	➔	• Knowledge, beliefs, personality traits
• Interpersonal	➔	• Family, friends, peers
• Institutional	➔	• Rules, regulations, policies
• Community	➔	• Social norms, standards
• Public Policy	➔	• Laws, federal policies

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The Health Belief Model

- Developed by U.S. Public Health Services
- Depend on the perceptions of:
 - Likelihood of getting the illness
 - The severity of the illness if they get it
 - Benefits of engaging in behavior that will prevent the illness
 - Barriers to engaging in preventive behavior

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Stages of Change Model

- Developed in the 1990's for work with alcohol and drug abuse.
- Theory: Change in behavior is a process and that different people are at different stages of readiness for change.

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Stages of Change Model

- Stages
 - Precontemplation
 - Contemplation
 - Decision/Determination
 - Action
 - Maintenance



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The Diffusion of Innovation Model

- Initially developed to help promote agricultural change in the U.S.
- Innovation = idea or practice that's new to an individual
- Diffusion = how the idea is communicated
- Focus: How people adopt and can be encouraged to adopt "innovations"
- Does not address maintenance of innovations

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The Diffusion of Innovation Model

- Stages of Diffusion
 - Recognition of a problem
 - Research how to fix the problem
 - Develop strategies to meet the people's needs
 - Commercialization of the innovation
 - Diffusion and adoption of the innovation
 - Consequences of adoption

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The Diffusion of Innovation Model

- The speed of adoption is influenced by:
 - Perceived gains
 - How the innovation fits into their culture
 - How easy it is to use
 - Presence of role-models
 - Cost-efficient



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Understanding Behaviors

- The behaviors that are taking place have many underlying causes
- Underlying motivation for these behaviors is both individual and cultural
- Different approaches to changing the unhealthy behavior must be adopted in different cultures

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Changing Health Behaviors

- Community Mobilization
 - Get the entire community involved
 - Find a “champion” for the cause
- Mass Media
 - TV, internet, radio, cell phones
 - Entertainment education
 - Soap opera (Myanmar)



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Social Marketing

- Social Marketing: using the tools of commercial marketing to promote behavior change
 - Need good understanding of culture, values, and behaviors
 - The 4 P’s
 - Attractive Product
 - Affordable Price
 - Convenient places to buy the product
 - Persuasive promotion
 - Example: Selling bed nets for Malaria control



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Health Education

- Health Education
 - Provide accurate understandable information
 - Address how to deal with social issues
 - Instructors must believe in what they teach
 - Use age and culture appropriate material



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Social Assessment

- “Promotes community development and empowerment, builds capacity, and develops social capital.”



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Social Assessment

- Identifies interested and affected people
- Identifies activities that can make an impact
- Provides alternatives and ideas for reducing negative impacts
- Describes potential conflicts
- Contributes to skill development
- Helps with monitoring and managing the program

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Main Messages

- Culture is a set of beliefs and behaviors that are learned and shared
- Culture operates in many domains
- Culture is an important determinant of health
- There are many models of behavior change
- Need to understand culture and behavior to be able to promote behavior change

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Questions for Consideration

- How can behavior be a contributing factor for illness and premature death in the developing world?
- How does culture relate to people's perception of illness?
- Can you name three cultural practices that are health promoting, and three that are harmful to health?