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”

**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.

**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)

Health Behaviors

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

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

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.”

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

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
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.

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

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

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
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)

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

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

Social Assessment

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

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

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
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?