

07 - Society as a risk factor

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© SPMM Course 6. Social factors and mental health issues Society as a risk factor Engel's model of biopsychosocial approach is widely used in aetiological formulations in psychiatric practice, highlighting the prominence of social factors in the practice of psychiatry. Social Causation Theory: According to this concept, mental illnesses are caused by social deprivation. Most psychiatric disorders are seen in lower socio-economic class as a mental disorder is seen as directly due to the poverty and social conditions. This theory may hold for some conditions such as depression or alcohol misuse, but not for others such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. In a survey sampling males aged 25-34 on first admission of schizophrenia, an expected excess of social class V was noted but social class distribution of fathers of the patients was the same as the general population suggesting that schizophrenia results in a downward drift of economic status rather than poverty being a cause for schizophrenia. This Social Drift or Social Selection Theory was first suggested by Faris & Dunham on the basis of their 'Chicago study 1922 - 1934' that explored the relation between the spatial distribution of psychosis and social organization by applying the concentric zone model of urban organization (see the figure from university of Manitoba, Centre of Health Policy website). In this model, the social organization increased with distance from the epicenter. (Inner urban zones = most disorganized and unstable communities; outer zones = most organized and stable communities). Faris and Dunham found that the least socially organized inner urban zones had the highest rates of schizophrenia; they argued that this effect was due to the downward drift in economic status after developing the illness.

Factors mediating the effect of social class: Several factors such as lower educational levels, poverty, immigration, overcrowding, poorer physical health and nutrition influence the higher prevalence of mental illness in some social classes. For example, high parental education levels are associated with a lower risk of ADHD, especially in boys. There is no proven link with food additives but lead exposure is associated with risk. Similarly,

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