

Social and community context as social determinants of health

As we have discussed during this course, **one of the key principles in the SDH approach is the notion that both social and environmental factors decisively influence peoples' health.** Therefore, it is essential to understand how those determinants manifest in various contexts, to truly make a difference.

In addition to the material components discussed under **Neighbourhood and Built environment** section (next), it is essential to include the social and community context in the examination of health outcomes. There is a wealth of studies demonstrating that many of the common health problems have their causes in the societal structures and community context. Therefore actions confined to health sector would not be enough to tackle them.



Background thinking here is that all individual behaviour, including health behaviour, needs to be understood in terms of social and community context.

According to Etzioni, communities have two characteristics:

- 1) affect-laden relationships among group of individuals that reinforce one another, and
- 2) a commitment to shared values, norms, and meanings as well as shared history and identity.

An understanding of the effects of SDH on health must include an **understanding of how health problems are experienced by people living within these contexts, the neighbourhood characteristics that affect their daily lives and guide behaviour.** The section below explores how neighbourhoods may be associated, both positively and negatively, to health and well-being.



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The social and community context as perceived by its members, including their belonging and ownership, as well as social networks, norms, reciprocity, and trustworthiness that form their social capital, has repercussions on individual health. Importantly, this is in addition to individual and family characteristics and behaviours. Research has shown that living in poor or disadvantaged neighbourhoods is associated with generally poorer health status and health outcomes, independent of individual level socio-economic characteristics.

By definition, social and community impact on health varies depending on the context.

Social environment in different contexts has diverse features which have health impact. These may be for example discrimination, ethnicity as it applies to social customs and traditions, family structure and, marital status, and gender roles.

Therefore, the literature is mostly confined by geographic region. Many of the studies aim to understand health behaviour in order to present health problems. Below, we'll have a closer look at a few selected features of social and community context:

- Family Structure
- Social Cohesion
- Ethnicity, minorities?
- health behaviour, smoking, drinking, exercise, eating habits?