

ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

SES AFFECTS OUR SOCIETY

Low SES and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society as a whole. Inequities in wealth and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Despite these challenges, behavioral and other social science professionals possess the tools necessary to study and identify strategies that could alleviate these disparities at both individual and societal levels. Variance in socioeconomic status, including disparities in the distribution of wealth, income, and access to resources, affects everyone.

SES and race and ethnicity are intimately intertwined. Research has shown that race and ethnicity in terms of stratification often determine a person's socioeconomic status (House & Williams, 2000). Furthermore, communities are often segregated by SES, race, and ethnicity. These communities commonly share characteristics of developing nations: low economic development, poor health conditions, and low levels of educational attainment. Low SES has consistently been implicated as a risk factor for many of the problems that plague communities. Seeking protective factors to minimize these risks, researchers have reviewed literature that highlights the resilience of persons overcoming

social challenges associated with skewed distribution of resources (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004). It is important to understand that continually skewed distributions breed conditions that ultimately affect our entire society. Thus, society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and its correlates, such as racial and ethnic discrimination and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

SES IMPACTS THE LIVES OF MANY ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES

Discrimination and marginalization are sometimes barriers for ethnic and racial minorities seeking to escape poverty (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004).

- African American children are 3 times more likely to live in poverty than Caucasian children. American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian families are more likely than Caucasian and Asian families to live in poverty (Costello, Keeler, & Angold, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).
- Although the income of Asian American families is often markedly above other minorities, these families also often have four to five family members working (Le, 2008).
- Minorities are more likely to receive high-cost mortgages: African Americans (53%) and Latinos (43%), in comparison to Caucasians (18%) (Logan, 2008).
- Unemployment rates for African Americans are typically double those of Caucasian Americans. African American men working full time earn 72 % of the average earnings of comparable Caucasian men and 85% of the earnings of Caucasian women (Rodgers, 2008).



Education

Despite dramatic changes, large gaps remain when minority education attainment is compared to that of Caucasian Americans (American Council on Education, 2006).

- African Americans and Latinos are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than Asian Americans and Caucasians (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).
- In 2005, the high school dropout rate of Latinos was highest, followed by those of African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).
- In addition to socioeconomic realities that may deprive students of valuable resources, high-achieving African American students may be exposed to less rigorous curriculums, attend schools with fewer resources, and have teachers who expect less of them academically than they expect of similarly situated Caucasian students (Azzam, 2008).

Physical Health

Systemic prejudices against ethnic minorities in the United States create additional barriers in health care that exist regardless of class.

- In one study, one-fourth of American women of South Asian descent from affluent backgrounds did not have a Pap smear in over 3 years. Those from low socioeconomic status are even more at risk for not having this early detection test yearly (Chaudhry, Fink, Gelberg, & Brook, 2003).
- Socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity have been associated with avoidable procedures, avoidable hospitalizations, and untreated disease (Fiscella, Franks, Gold, & Clancy, 2008).
- Low birth weight, which is related to a number of negative child health outcomes, has been associated with lower SES and ethnic/minority status (Fiscella et al., 2008).

Psychological Health

Socioeconomic deprivation and racial discrimination have been implicated higher psychological distress.

- Minority children in high-poverty areas are more likely to be exposed to alcohol and tobacco advertisements (Wallace, 1999) and drug distribution (Wallace, 1999); they are also more likely to use drugs and exhibit antisocial behaviors (Dubow, Edwards, & Ippolito, 1997).
- The odds of being diagnosed with schizophrenia were significantly higher for African Americans than Caucasians in lower poverty areas (Chow et al., 2003).

- African Americans are at higher risk for involuntary psychiatric commitment than any other racial group. African Americans and Latinos in low-poverty areas were more likely to be referred for commitment by a law enforcement official than any other racial group (Chow et al., 2003).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Include SES in your research, practice, and educational endeavors.

- Contribute to the body of research on the societal barriers experienced by ethnic/racial minorities, particularly those of lower SES, and the impact of these barriers on health and well-being. Report participant characteristics related to SES
- Develop models and measures of SES that reflect the social and historical complexities of communities of color.
- Consider how SES affects ethnic/racial minority clients' presenting problems, ways of coping, and the development of effective treatment strategies.
- Practice proactive screening of ethnic/racial minority clients for psychosocial related psychological and physical distress and practice coordinating care with other health care professionals serving these clients.
- Ensure that trainees are sensitive to ethnic/racial perspectives and implications of ethnic/racial status on the psychological and physical health of clients. Provide trainees with specialized training on the screening and treatment of a diverse social class of ethnic/racial minority populations.
- Recognize the negative attitudes towards ethnic/racial minorities that exists and advocate for cultural and linguistic competence.

Get involved.

- Support legislation and policies that explore and work to eliminate socioeconomic disparities. Visit the Office on Government Relations for more details: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/pi/>
- Become an SES Key Contact! As an expert, advocate for SES related issues.
- Join APA's SES Network to contribute to and stay abreast of current developments in SES-related activities.
- Visit APA's Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/ses.
- Visit APA's Office on Ethnic Minority Affairs website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/>.

References can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/fact-sheet-references.aspx>.