Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Socioeconomic status can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poverty, specifically, is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors. Further, SES is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the life span, including physical and psychological health. Thus, SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

SES AFFECTS OUR SOCIETY
SES affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society. Inequities in health distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

SES IMPACTS THE LIVES OF WOMEN
Research indicates that SES is a key factor in determining the quality of life for women; by extension, it strongly influences the lives of children and families. Inequities in wealth and quality of life for women are long-standing and exist both locally and globally. Behavioral and social science professionals possess the tools necessary to study and identify strategies that could alleviate these disparities at both the individual and societal level.

Quality of Life
Evidence indicates that socioeconomic status affects overall well-being and quality of life for women.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), women’s poverty rates were once again substantially above the poverty rates for men. More than 1 in 7 women (nearly 18.4 million) lived in poverty in 2014.
- In 2012, the poverty rate was 14.5% for women, compared to 11% for men (Entmacher, Robbins, Vogtman, & Frohlich, 2013). In all racial and ethnic groups, women experienced higher poverty rates than White, non-Hispanic men. Poverty rates for all groups of adult women were also higher than for their male counterparts (Eichner & Robbins, 2015).
- Eight out of 10 women have full custody of their children, and custodial mothers are twice as likely to have low SES as custodial fathers (Cawthorne, 2008).
- Domest and sexual violence against women can often lead to a cycle of poverty through job loss, poor health, and homelessness (Cawthorne, 2008).
- In 2014, twice as many women aged 65 and older lived in poverty (over 3 million) compared to men (over 1.5 million) in the same age range (Eichner & Robbins, 2015).

Income and Earning Ability
Historically and presently in the United States, men are paid more than women, despite similar levels of education and equivalent fields of occupation. Reduced income for women, coupled with longer life expectancy and increased responsibility to raise children, increase probabilities that women will face economic disadvantages.
The pay gap has steadily narrowed over time; however, in recent years the progress made toward eliminating the pay gap has essentially plateaued. In the 10 years between 2004 and 2014, the earnings ratio slightly increased from 78% in 2013 to 79% in 2014; the pay gap remains 21% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

In 2015, women with a high school diploma were paid 80% of what men with a high school diploma were paid. Women with postgraduate degrees were paid 74% of what their male peers were paid (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 as cited by National Women’s Law Center).

Single-mother families, generally relying on the earnings of one adult, are more than 5 times as likely to be living in poverty as married-couple families (Cancian & Reed, 2008).

Pregnancy affects work and educational opportunities for women. The cost associated with pregnancy is higher for women than men. In addition, unplanned or untimely pregnancies can prevent women from finishing their education or sustaining employment (Cawthorne, 2008).

According to a survey, 46% of women believe they have experienced gender discrimination (McCain Nelson, 2013).

**Psychological Health**

There is increasing evidence supporting the link between lower SES and negative psychological health outcomes for women.

- Pregnant women with low SES report significantly more depressive symptoms, which suggests that the third trimester may be more stressful for low-income women (Goyal et al., 2010).

- At 2 and 3 months postpartum, women with low income have been found to experience significantly more depressive symptoms than women with high-income (Goyal et al., 2010).

- Women with insecure, low-status jobs with little to no decision-making authority experience higher levels of negative life events, insecure housing tenure, more chronic stressors, and reduced social support. Low employment rank is a strong predictor of depression (World Health Organization, 2013).

- Rates of depression and anxiety have increased significantly for poor women in developing countries undergoing restructuring (World Health Organization, 2013).

- Data show that 1 in 9 babies has a mother suffering from severe depression, and half have mothers experiencing depression at some level of severity (Veriker, Macomber, & Golden, 2010).

- Women with low income are more likely to develop problems with drinking and drug addiction, which are significantly influenced by the social stressors linked to poverty (Mulia, Schmidt, Bond, Jacobs, & Korcha, 2008).

- Lack of safe, affordable housing puts women and children at greater risk for violent victimization and depression (World Health Organization, 2013).

- Improved balance in gender roles and obligations, pay equity, poverty reduction, and renewed attention to the maintenance of social capital would further redress the gender disparities in mental health (World Health Organization, 2013).

**Physical Health**

Research on women's health continues to link lower SES to a variety of negative health outcomes for women and their children.

- Results of breast cancer studies indicate that women living with breast cancer are 11% more likely to die if they live within lower SES communities (Du, Fang, & Meyer, 2008).

- Low-income women who have no insurance have the lowest rates of mammography screening among women aged 40-64, increasing their risk of death from breast cancer (Sabatino et al., 2008).

- Obesity, risk for becoming obese, and staying obese from adolescence to young adulthood are strongly related to poverty among women (Lee, Harris, & Gordon-Larsen, 2009).

- Compared to HIV-positive men, women with HIV are disproportionately low income in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012).

- Poverty is the most significant indicator of whether heterosexuals living in the inner city will develop the AIDS virus. According to a recent study, the HIV infection rate nearly doubled within 2 years from 6.3% to 12.1% among some heterosexual women in the poorest neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012).

**GET INVOLVED**

- Consider SES in your education, practice, and research efforts.

- Stay up to date on 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/

- Visit APA’s Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/SES

- Visit APA’s Women’s Program Office website: http://www.apa.org/pi/women/

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