
Editorial

Social Determinants of Health: Theme Issue on Poverty and Human Development

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October 2007 is the witness to an undertaking by more than 200 journal editors around the world. Organized by the Council of Science Editors (CSE), these journals are publishing a Global Theme Issue on Poverty and Human Development. As CSE has announced, the purpose of this universal theme issue is “to raise awareness, stimulate interest, and stimulate research into poverty and human development”.¹ Archives of Iranian Medicine (AIM) was among the journals, which joined this collaboration and has devoted part of its current issue to the theme. As implied by name of the Journal and expressed in its aims and scope it is a “peer-reviewed multidisciplinary medical publication”.² Thus, the articles selected for this theme issue address health and medical care-related aspects of human development.

It is almost undisputable that many factors not directly related to healthcare or medical systems affect people’s health. These social determinants of health may play a more important role in the health of communities than the performance of the healthcare system itself.³ It can be concluded that inequality in social determinants has a major impact on health equity.

In Iran, the past 20 years have been accompanied by remarkable improvement in many health indicators, decreased child and maternal mortality rates and increased life expectancy at birth.⁴ Besides activities within the health system, general improvements in living conditions also seem to play an important role. For instance, 92% of the population have access to safe drinking water⁵ (one of the highest rates in the region), and in rural areas more than 90% use refrigerators (compared to less than 5% in 1970).⁶

Many efforts have focused on promoting health equity as well. Two original studies in this issue address the role of social determinants, in the context of these efforts, on different aspects of health in the country. Hosseinpour et al⁷ have looked at the utilization of outpatient care and its determinants, and shown that still some groups need more attention: the poor, the uninsured and people in remote rural areas. The article, which is based on a national survey, also contains useful information on health system in the country. Moradi-Lakeh and colleagues⁸ have also used the data from a large national study to investigate the determinants of safe delivery among Iranian women. They have shown that place of residence (urban/rural) plays little role in access to safe delivery facilities, which probably is the result of widespread access to delivery facilities in rural areas. On the other hand, mothers’ education has a major impact; a finding that undermines the importance of intersectoral cooperation in development plans. Another article in this issue, which is indirectly related to the theme, is by Nojomi et al.⁹ By showing the effect of unemployment on suicide attempts, this article also finds its way to this theme issue.

Little can be done to improve communities’ health, without paying attention to the social conditions in which people live and work.¹⁰ All over the world, joint efforts by scientists, policy makers and the people are necessary to improve these conditions; journals show they are an inseparable part of this campaign by publishing this Global Theme Issue.

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