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Micro-Psychology in Public Health Promotion

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The Role of Psychology in Health Promotion

McLeroy and colleague suggest it is “regrettable” that dominant contributions to the literature on intervention in health have been from psychology. Is it “regrettable” because these behavioral change theories (rooted in psychology) regarding health would be merely at the individual level rather than the population level? I agree that the concentration of behavioral science application would be better serving if renewed focus was on its application in the organizational, institutional, environmental, and economic domains – this would promote macro-level improvements to behaviors and conditions. But in order to initiate motivation for individuals to act towards or against ideals greater than themselves, they should also recognize the effects of behavioral change on the micro-level, which I believe can be demonstrated through psychological behavior change theories.

Victim Blaming

Ignoring root causes and the impact societal factors have in an individual’s health is a prerequisite for victim blaming. Psychological behavior theories are misapplied when put to public health [1]. When applying psychological theories to specific health behaviors, the result is an incorporation of multiple process and influences. This is problematic from a public health perspective because the focus is on how to change individuals rather than alter the social environment [2]. Even when the aim is prevention of undesired behavior rather than treatment, what is missing is recognizing the importance of the source of influence and social groups to which individuals belong. Social networks affect the access and acceptability to information and behaviors; for example,

professional and organizational membership. Organizational/professional context provides an inventory for financial and social benefits, provide context for sedentary lifestyle, or hazardous tasks. It may also provide opportunity for physical activity and positive social relationships, as well. One of the purposes of health promotion in the workplace is to change “cooperate culture”. This is observable in many locations such as Google and other industry firms that extend lunch breaks to allow for exercise/offer gym memberships as benefits. I recommend these benefits in the pursuit of improved health be extended to include more industries.

Already identified by Rothstein R [3] and Woods LL, et al. [4], community factors are supremely important in shaping the social relationship between an individual and health. In addition to a physical aggregate of individuals in a geographical location, community may refer to the psychological sense of community, political entity, functional spatial unit, or unit of patterned social interaction. The socially constructed power structures within community are what drive the political action of the community; the disadvantaged tend to have softest voice and can affect the least amount of change. The end result of ignoring such social phenomena is a tendency to blame the victim for their health status, rather than to explain the root of their behavior.

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Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict interest.

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