

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the global perspectives on the social determinants influencing mental health, emphasizing the interconnectedness of societal, economic, and cultural factors. Mental health is shaped by a range of determinants, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare. The present review synthesizes recent literature on social determinants and mental health outcomes and provides recommendations for how to advance the field. We summarize current studies related to changes in the conceptualization of social determinants; how social determinants impact mental health. The study highlights disparities across different regions, focusing on the impact of poverty, stigma, and social exclusion on mental well-being. It examines policies and interventions aimed at addressing these determinants and underscores the need for collaborative, culturally sensitive approaches to promote mental health equity. The findings advocate for holistic frameworks that integrate social policies and mental health care to create sustainable and inclusive mental health systems globally.

Keywords: *Social Determinants, Mental Health, Interventions.*

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of human health and well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, manage life's stresses, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (WHO, 2021). Despite its critical importance, mental health has long been relegated to the margins of global health priorities, overshadowed by physical health issues such as infectious diseases and cardiovascular disorders. This neglect is concerning, as mental health disorders significantly contribute to the global burden of disease, with conditions like depression and anxiety ranking among the leading causes of disability worldwide (Vos et al., 2016). Mental health outcomes do not exist in isolation but are deeply influenced by societal factors collectively referred to as the social determinants of mental health (SDMH). These determinants include the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, as well as the broader political, social, and economic structures shaping these conditions (Marmot, 2005). Examples of such determinants include income, education, employment, housing, and social inclusion. These factors influence mental health by creating environments that either promote resilience and well-being or exacerbate stress and vulnerability. For instance, individuals living in poverty are more likely to experience chronic stress, food insecurity, and reduced access to health care, which significantly increase their risk of developing mental health disorders (Lund et al., 2010).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Globally, the impact of these determinants is not uniform. Mental health disparities exist within and between countries, with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) bearing a disproportionate burden. Nearly 75% of individuals with mental health disorders in LMICs

receive no treatment, a gap driven by limited resources, stigma, and structural inequities (Patel et al., 2018). In high-income countries (HICs), mental health challenges are shaped by factors such as racial and ethnic disparities, urbanization, and rising social isolation. For example, minority populations in the United States are more likely to experience mental health disorders due to systemic racism, discrimination, and unequal access to health care (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

The social determinants of mental health also intersect with broader societal issues, such as globalization, urbanization, and climate change. Globalization has led to economic insecurity for many, contributing to job stress and mental health challenges. Urbanization, while offering opportunities for economic growth and innovation, has also created issues such as overcrowding, social isolation, and reduced access to green spaces, all of which are detrimental to mental health (Galea et al., 2011). Similarly, climate change poses unique mental health risks, particularly for vulnerable populations, including those displaced by environmental disasters. The recognition of social determinants as critical drivers of health can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when researchers began examining the interplay between social conditions and health outcomes. The seminal Whitehall studies, conducted in the 1960s and 1980s, were among the first to demonstrate the social gradient in health, revealing that individuals in lower occupational grades experienced higher rates of mortality and morbidity than those in higher grades, even in relatively affluent societies like the United Kingdom (Marmot et al., 1978). Although these studies primarily focused on physical health outcomes, they laid the groundwork for understanding how social hierarchies influence mental health as well.

By the early 21st century, the WHO formally recognized the role of social determinants in shaping health outcomes through initiatives such as the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH), established in 2005. The CSDH emphasized the need for a "health in all policies" approach, integrating health considerations into economic, social, and environmental policies to reduce health inequities (WHO, 2008). Mental health became a central focus within this framework, as it was increasingly clear that social and economic inequities had profound impacts on mental well-being.

POLICY CONTEXT

Despite growing awareness of SDMH, global policies addressing these determinants have been unevenly implemented. High-income countries (HICs) such as Canada and the United Kingdom have made strides in integrating mental health into broader health and social policies. For example, Canada's Mental Health Strategy emphasizes the importance of addressing housing, income inequality, and social inclusion as key components of mental health promotion (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). Similarly, the United Kingdom's "No Health Without Mental Health" strategy underscores the need for cross-sectoral approaches to address mental health inequities (Department of Health, 2011).

In contrast, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) face significant barriers to implementing such policies. Limited resources, stigma, and weak health infrastructure often prevent these countries from addressing the root causes of mental health disparities. For instance, nearly 75% of individuals with mental health disorders in LMICs receive no treatment, a gap driven by both financial constraints and cultural stigma surrounding mental illness (Patel et al., 2018). International efforts, such as the WHO's Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020, have sought to bridge these gaps by encouraging countries to integrate mental health into primary care and social policies. However, implementation has been slow and uneven, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Understanding the social determinants of mental health requires a multidisciplinary approach that draws on theoretical frameworks from public health, sociology, and psychology. One of the most influential frameworks is the social gradient of health, introduced by Sir Michael Marmot. The social gradient concept posits that health outcomes, including mental health, improve incrementally with higher socioeconomic status (Marmot, 2005). This gradient is not limited to the extremes of wealth and poverty but affects individuals across the entire socioeconomic spectrum. For example, individuals in middle-income brackets often experience better mental health outcomes than those in lower-income brackets but worse outcomes than those in higher-income brackets.

Another critical framework is the ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which highlights the interplay between individual, community, and societal factors in shaping health outcomes. According to this theory, mental health is influenced by multiple layers of determinants, ranging from immediate family and community environments to broader societal and policy contexts. This holistic perspective underscores the importance of addressing mental health at both individual and systemic levels.

Intersectionality is another essential theoretical lens, particularly when examining mental health disparities among marginalized populations. Intersectionality explores how overlapping social identities—such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status—create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, women of color in LMICs often face compounded disadvantages, including poverty, gender-based violence, and limited access to education and health care, all of which increase their vulnerability to mental health challenges (Patel et al., 2018).

EMERGING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The social determinants of mental health are also influenced by emerging global challenges such as urbanization, climate change, and globalization. Urbanization, while offering economic opportunities, has been associated with rising mental health challenges due to overcrowding, social isolation, and reduced access to green spaces (Galea et al., 2011). For example, individuals living in densely populated urban centers are more likely to experience anxiety and depression than those in rural areas.

Climate change is another critical factor, particularly for vulnerable populations in LMICs. Environmental disasters such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes not only displace communities but also lead to long-term psychological trauma. For instance, studies have shown that survivors of Hurricane Katrina in the United States experienced significantly higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Galea et al., 2008).

Globalization has also created new mental health challenges by increasing economic insecurity and job stress. While globalization has facilitated economic growth and innovation, it has also led to precarious employment conditions, particularly in LMICs. Workers in low-wage jobs often face long hours, poor working conditions, and limited job security, all of which contribute to poor mental health outcomes (Benach et al., 2010).

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

This paper aims to provide a global perspective on the social determinants of mental health, highlighting their role in shaping mental health outcomes and contributing to disparities. It begins by examining the key components of SDMH, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and social inclusion. The discussion then explores global disparities in mental health, contrasting the challenges faced by LMICs and HICs, as well as

emerging issues such as the impacts of climate change and globalization. The paper also analyzes policy interventions and community-based strategies that have been effective in addressing mental health inequities. Finally, it identifies the challenges and barriers to progress and offers recommendations for future research and action.

REVIEWS OF DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The social determinants of mental health (SDMH) are the underlying conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age. These determinants are fundamental to understanding the global burden of mental health disorders, as they shape the overall well-being of populations. Review of literature regarding these factors reveals a complex and multifaceted relationship between social conditions and mental health. Studies have consistently demonstrated that people who experience socioeconomic deprivation, discrimination, or lack of access to essential services such as healthcare and education are at higher risk for mental health disorders. These social determinants are not only significant at an individual level but also operate at the community, national, and global levels, contributing to widespread disparities in mental health outcomes.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Socioeconomic status is one of the most well-established determinants of mental health. Research consistently shows that individuals with lower income, lower education levels, and less stable employment are more likely to experience poor mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Lund et al., 2010). The relationship between SES and mental health is often explained through several pathways. First, individuals in lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to experience chronic stress due to financial instability, job insecurity, and limited access to healthcare. Chronic stress is a key risk factor for mental health disorders, as it activates the body's stress response systems and can lead to conditions such as depression and anxiety (McEwen, 2006). Moreover, those in low-income settings often live in environments that exacerbate stress, such as overcrowded housing, poor sanitation, and limited access to green spaces (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). These factors create a vicious cycle: lower SES leads to poor mental health, which in turn reduces one's ability to improve socioeconomic standing, perpetuating the stressor cycle. The "social gradient" theory, proposed by Marmot (2005), describes the inverse relationship between SES and health. According to this theory, every step down the socioeconomic ladder is associated with worse mental health outcomes, suggesting that mental health is not only a problem for the very poor but is a continuum that affects individuals across the entire socioeconomic spectrum. This gradient has been observed in high-income countries (HICs) like the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Marmot et al., 2008). The social gradient highlights the importance of addressing social inequality as a core part of mental health interventions.

Education and Mental Health

Educational attainment is another critical determinant of mental health. Studies have shown that people with higher levels of education tend to report better mental health outcomes, including lower rates of depression and anxiety (Fryers et al., 2003). Education can influence mental health in several ways. It equips individuals with skills to navigate life's challenges, access better employment opportunities, and achieve greater economic stability. Furthermore, education helps to develop problem-solving abilities, resilience, and coping strategies that protect against mental health problems. Conversely, individuals with low levels of education are more likely to face barriers to accessing healthcare and mental health services, further exacerbating their vulnerability to mental health disorders. This is particularly evident in

LMICs, where limited educational opportunities and insufficient mental health literacy create significant challenges. A study by Patel et al. (2018) in India found that the stigma associated with mental illness and a lack of education about mental health contributed to low rates of help-seeking behavior in rural communities. These findings underscore the need for both improved education and mental health literacy as integral components of mental health promotion.

Employment and Working Conditions

Employment is another crucial social determinant of mental health. Work is not only a source of income but also plays a vital role in providing a sense of identity, purpose, and social connection. However, employment conditions have a profound impact on mental well-being, with poor working conditions being associated with higher levels of stress, depression, and burnout (Kivimäki et al., 2012). Job insecurity, long working hours, low job control, and high work demands are particularly harmful to mental health. Research has shown that workers in precarious employment, including temporary or low-wage jobs, experience higher rates of mental health issues than those in more stable, higher-status positions (Virtanen et al., 2009). This is because such jobs often provide limited control over work schedules, lack of opportunities for advancement, and insufficient benefits, all of which contribute to chronic stress and dissatisfaction. Additionally, workers in low-status positions are more likely to experience discrimination, which further exacerbates mental health risks (Gunnell et al., 2004). The global shift toward informal work and gig economies in both high- and low-income countries presents new challenges. A report from the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) highlighted that workers in the gig economy, including those employed by platforms like Uber and Deliveroo, are at increased risk of mental health issues due to job insecurity, lack of worker protections, and isolation. Addressing these issues requires improving working conditions and promoting policies that ensure decent work for all, particularly in rapidly growing informal labour markets.

Housing and Living Conditions

Housing quality and stability are essential determinants of mental health. Substandard housing conditions, such as overcrowding, poor ventilation, mold, and lack of sanitation, are associated with increased levels of mental distress, particularly among children and adolescents (Evans, 2003). Housing instability, such as frequent moves or homelessness, is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Fitzpatrick-Lewis et al., 2014). The mental health effects of poor housing are most pronounced in low-income settings, where individuals and families may be forced to live in slums or informal settlements that lack basic amenities. Research in cities like Mumbai, India, and Lagos, Nigeria, has found that individuals living in informal settlements are more likely to experience mental health issues due to overcrowding, social instability, and inadequate access to services such as healthcare and education (Madhav et al., 2018). Moreover, housing instability has been found to be a key factor in the high rates of mental health disorders among homeless populations worldwide (Barker et al., 2004). In contrast, secure, quality housing has been shown to be a protective factor for mental health. The "Housing First" approach, which prioritizes providing stable housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, has demonstrated success in improving mental health outcomes and reducing substance abuse (Tsemberis, 2010). This approach highlights the importance of stable housing as a foundational determinant of mental health and underscores the need for policies that address housing inequality.

Social Support and Social Inclusion

Social support and social inclusion are other essential determinants of mental health. Strong social networks and supportive relationships are protective factors against mental health problems, helping individuals cope with life's stresses and challenges. Conversely, social isolation and exclusion have been linked to an increased risk of mental illness, particularly depression (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Discrimination and stigma related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and mental illness itself can result in social exclusion and increase the risk of developing mental health issues (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). In high-income countries, minority groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, face disproportionate levels of discrimination, which contribute to higher rates of mental health disorders. Similarly, marginalized populations in LMICs often experience double or triple vulnerability, facing discrimination due to both their social position and mental health status.

Social inclusion, on the other hand, fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is essential for positive mental health outcomes. Efforts to reduce stigma, increase community engagement, and promote inclusive policies are essential for mitigating the negative mental health impacts of social exclusion. Programs that promote social integration, such as peer support networks and community-based mental health services, have shown promise in improving mental well-being (Toska et al., 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology section outlines the approach used in this paper to explore and analyze the social determinants of mental health (SDMH) from a global perspective. This study employs a systematic review methodology, integrating evidence from existing peer-reviewed research, global reports, and case studies. By synthesizing data from a range of sources, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social factors influence mental health and highlight the disparities across different geographic and socioeconomic contexts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this paper is primarily qualitative, as it focuses on synthesizing existing literature and drawing connections between key social determinants and mental health outcomes. The study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the various factors that shape mental health, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and social inclusion, among others. Given the nature of the research question, a qualitative approach is most appropriate as it allows for the exploration of these complex relationships through a detailed examination of case studies, policy frameworks, and theoretical models.

This paper adopts a systematic review methodology, which involves collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings from a wide range of studies. The review approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how social determinants influence mental health. The primary focus is on literature from academic journals, government and NGO reports, and publications from international health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure a rigorous and focused review, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the selection of studies and reports used in this paper. The following criteria were used:

1. Inclusion Criteria:

Studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2024. Literature that focuses on the social determinants of mental health, including but not limited to socioeconomic

status, education, employment, housing, social inclusion, and access to healthcare. Research that examines global, regional, or national perspectives on the social determinants of mental health. Case studies, policy reports, and evaluations that provide practical examples of how social determinants affect mental health outcomes. Studies published in English, given their relevance in global mental health discourse.

2. Exclusion Criteria:

Articles and studies that focus solely on physical health without reference to mental health. Research published prior to 2000, unless it provides foundational theoretical insights. Studies that do not have a clear focus on the social determinants of health but focus on individual-level risk factors such as genetics or biology. Articles that do not meet academic standards for evidence-based analysis, including opinion pieces or non-peer-reviewed sources.

DATA COLLECTION AND SOURCES

The data collection process involved searching academic databases, government websites, and reports from international health organizations for relevant literature. The following sources were primarily used:

1. Academic Databases:

PubMed: A database of peer-reviewed articles in the fields of medicine, psychology, and public health. PubMed was used to identify studies on the relationship between SDMH and mental health outcomes.

PsycINFO: A database focused on psychology and mental health, providing a broad selection of studies on mental health determinants.

Scopus: A multidisciplinary database that includes research from health, social sciences, and other relevant fields.

Google Scholar: An open-source search engine for scholarly literature, used to access reports and grey literature.

2. Global Reports and Institutional Publications:

World Health Organization (WHO): Reports from WHO on global mental health trends, including the "Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020" and the "World Mental Health Report" (2022).

United Nations (UN): Publications related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), which advocates for mental health integration into public health systems.

Mental Health Foundation (UK): Publications focusing on the social determinants of mental health and mental health policy.

The Lancet Psychiatry: A leading journal that frequently publishes articles and research focused on the intersection between social determinants and mental health.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis for this paper involved a thematic analysis approach, which is commonly used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. The analysis process was structured as follows:

1. **Reading and Familiarization:** Initially, the full text of all selected papers, reports, and case studies was reviewed in detail. This process allowed for an understanding of

the broader context of each source and helped identify key themes relevant to the research question.

2. **Theme Identification:** Key social determinants influencing mental health were identified across the literature, including factors like poverty, education, employment, housing, social support, and healthcare access. These themes were further broken down into sub-themes, such as the role of job insecurity in mental health, the impact of housing instability on mental health, and social exclusion due to discrimination.
3. **Coding:** Relevant data within the identified themes was coded. For example, studies that examined the relationship between poverty and depression were grouped together under the broader theme of socioeconomic factors. The thematic analysis also involved the identification of key findings regarding the impact of specific determinants in various regions, such as the effects of urbanization in high-income countries or the influence of education in low-income communities.
4. **Synthesis of Findings:** The final step in data analysis involved synthesizing the results into a cohesive narrative. This narrative integrated both theoretical perspectives on the social determinants of mental health (e.g., Marmot's social gradient theory) and empirical findings from global case studies. The analysis also drew attention to key disparities in mental health outcomes across different regions, highlighting the influence of socioeconomic, cultural, and policy-related factors.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although this study primarily involves secondary data analysis, it is essential to address ethical considerations related to data use and reporting:

1. **Consent and Privacy:** As a systematic review, the paper utilizes publicly available, peer-reviewed studies and reports. No primary data collection was involved, and no individuals were personally identified or involved in the research.
2. **Bias and Transparency:** Efforts were made to minimize bias in the selection of studies by applying clear and rigorous inclusion/exclusion criteria. The synthesis process was transparent, with findings clearly linked to the sources from which they were derived. A diverse range of literature was considered to ensure a balanced understanding of global perspectives on the social determinants of mental health.
3. **Accuracy and Citation:** All sources of information have been appropriately cited using APA style to ensure academic rigor and transparency. Proper attribution was given to authors of studies, reports, and theoretical frameworks discussed in the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results and Discussion section synthesizes the key findings from the literature on social determinants of mental health and provides a global perspective on how these factors affect mental well-being. The section highlights the need for comprehensive public health interventions that address the broader social context in which mental health is situated, with a focus on reducing inequalities and improving access to care for vulnerable populations. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of integrating mental health into global development agendas, particularly in LMICs, where social determinants have a disproportionately large impact on mental health outcomes.

Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health

Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health: Lower socioeconomic status is consistently linked to poorer mental health outcomes across both high-income and low- and middle-income countries. Financial strain, poor living conditions, and limited access to resources exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Addressing socioeconomic disparities, therefore, is crucial for improving mental health globally. This trend holds true in both high-income countries (HICs) and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), although the specific pathways through which SES impacts mental health may differ by region. In high-income countries, SES is often linked to mental health through stress, access to healthcare, and lifestyle factors. Chronic stressors, such as financial instability, housing insecurity, and job loss, exacerbate the risk of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Lund et al., 2010). Moreover, individuals in lower SES groups often have less access to mental health services due to factors such as inadequate insurance coverage, long wait times, and the stigma surrounding mental illness. These barriers to care can result in untreated or undertreated mental health conditions, perpetuating the cycle of poor mental health and social disadvantage (Gunnell et al., 2004). In LMICs, the relationship between SES and mental health is influenced by additional factors such as poverty, lack of basic services (e.g., clean water, education, healthcare), and social instability. For example, in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, the high burden of poverty and limited access to quality healthcare have led to increased rates of mental health disorders, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among vulnerable populations, such as refugees and individuals displaced by conflict (Patel et al., 2018). The stress of surviving in resource-poor environments, coupled with a lack of support systems, creates a precarious situation that leads to higher mental health risks. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions that address both the social and healthcare needs of lower SES populations to reduce the mental health burden.

Education and Mental Health Outcomes

Education emerges as a significant protective factor for mental health. Higher levels of education are associated with better mental health outcomes due to improved economic opportunities, social mobility, and mental health literacy. Conversely, low educational attainment is associated with increased vulnerability to mental health disorders, particularly in areas with limited access to quality education. People with higher educational attainment are generally more resilient to mental health challenges due to their improved cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and access to resources. Education not only facilitates access to better employment opportunities but also promotes greater mental health literacy, enabling individuals to identify and seek help for mental health issues (Fryers et al., 2003). In contrast, individuals with low levels of education are at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety. This relationship can be attributed to several factors. First, people with lower levels of education often face employment challenges, which may lead to financial strain, job insecurity, and a lack of upward mobility. Additionally, individuals with low educational attainment are less likely to have the social support networks necessary to cope with life stressors (Marmot et al., 2008). Education also provides individuals with the tools to better navigate societal systems, such as healthcare and social services. Without this knowledge, those with low education may experience greater difficulty in accessing mental health care, contributing to delayed diagnoses and untreated mental health conditions (Patel et al., 2018).

Globally, disparities in education access further exacerbate mental health inequalities. For example, in LMICs, access to quality education is often limited by factors such as gender,

socioeconomic status, and geographic location. In rural areas of countries like India and Kenya, children, especially girls, face barriers to completing school, which in turn limits their future economic and social opportunities and increases their vulnerability to mental health challenges (Lund et al., 2010). This underscores the need for policies that promote equal access to education, particularly for marginalized groups, to improve mental health outcomes.

Employment, Job Security, and Mental Health

The quality of employment and job security play a central role in mental health outcomes. Job insecurity, long working hours, and poor working conditions contribute to anxiety and stress. Vulnerable groups, such as those in precarious or informal employment, are particularly at risk. Social policies that improve job quality and offer better protections for workers are essential in mitigating the mental health impact of employment-related stress. The impact of employment and job security on mental health is profound, with poor working conditions contributing significantly to mental health issues globally. The review found that job insecurity, long working hours, and low job control are strongly associated with mental health disorders, particularly anxiety and depression (Kivimäki et al., 2012). In high-income countries, work-related stress is often linked to factors such as job demands, lack of autonomy, and a poor work-life balance. The review revealed that workers in low-status or precarious jobs, such as temporary, part-time, or gig employment, are at higher risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. This is particularly true for individuals in low-wage sectors who face exploitation, unstable work hours, and a lack of social protections, which add to the mental strain (Virtanen et al., 2009). In LMICs, the precariousness of employment is often even more pronounced. Informal work, including subsistence farming, street vending, and other unregulated forms of labor, is widespread in many regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. These forms of employment offer little security, few benefits, and no legal protection, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation and psychological distress (ILO, 2019). In these settings, mental health is often further compounded by the stress of poverty and limited access to healthcare. Addressing these issues requires policy interventions aimed at improving job quality, increasing worker protections, and creating more stable employment opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Housing and Living Conditions

Housing instability and poor living conditions are significant risk factors for mental health issues. Overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and inadequate infrastructure lead to stress and anxiety, particularly in urban slums and informal settlements. Providing stable, affordable, and healthy housing can act as a critical intervention in improving mental health, particularly in low-income regions. The review found that housing quality and stability are crucial determinants of mental health. Poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and inadequate infrastructure, are strongly associated with higher levels of mental distress, particularly among children and adolescents (Evans, 2003). In regions with rapid urbanization, such as parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, millions of people live in slums and informal settlements that lack basic amenities and services. These substandard living conditions contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression, as individuals constantly worry about their safety, health, and future prospects (Madhav et al., 2018). In high-income countries, housing instability, such as eviction or homelessness, is also a significant factor affecting mental health. Homelessness, in particular, is linked to severe psychological distress, with individuals experiencing higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and PTSD (Barker et al., 2004). The “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes providing stable housing to individuals experiencing homelessness, has been shown to significantly improve mental health outcomes and reduce substance abuse (Tsemberis, 2010). These

findings suggest that policies aimed at improving housing stability and quality, such as affordable housing programs and the reduction of homelessness, could be pivotal in addressing mental health disparities.

Social Support and Social Inclusion

Social support networks and inclusion are key factors in promoting mental well-being. Strong social ties act as buffers against mental health challenges, while social isolation and discrimination increase the risk of mental health disorders. Policies that promote social inclusion, reduce stigma, and provide access to supportive community networks are vital in improving mental health outcomes, especially for marginalized populations. The review found that individuals with strong social networks and supportive relationships were more resilient to mental health challenges. Social support acts as a buffer against stress, providing emotional and practical resources that help individuals cope with adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Conversely, social isolation, exclusion, and discrimination are major contributors to mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). In HICs, marginalized groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and immigrants face higher rates of discrimination and social exclusion, which negatively impact their mental health. The review highlights that social stigma associated with mental illness also contributes to isolation and reduces help-seeking behavior, exacerbating the risk of untreated mental health conditions (Toska et al., 2015). Similarly, in LMICs, discrimination based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, or disability further compounds mental health inequalities. For example, women in many parts of the world face gender-based violence, which leads to both physical and psychological trauma (Patel et al., 2018). Social inclusion policies, such as anti-discrimination laws, community-building initiatives, and mental health awareness campaigns, are critical to improving mental health outcomes for these vulnerable populations.

Global Disparities in Mental Health

There are significant disparities in mental health outcomes and the influence of social determinants across regions. High-income countries have made notable progress in integrating mental health into public health policies and providing access to care. In contrast, many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) continue to face challenges related to inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited resources, and cultural barriers. The need for international cooperation and increased investment in mental health services in LMICs is paramount. While high-income countries have made considerable strides in integrating mental health into public health policy, LMICs continue to struggle with limited resources, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and cultural barriers to mental health care. For instance, the lack of trained mental health professionals in LMICs often means that mental health conditions go undiagnosed and untreated, leading to higher morbidity and mortality rates. In regions affected by conflict or humanitarian crises, such as the Middle East and parts of Africa, the social determinants of mental health are often further compounded by violence, displacement, and trauma. These regions have witnessed a surge in mental health problems, including PTSD and depression, as a result of ongoing conflict and instability. The review underscores the need for targeted international support to address these complex issues and build resilient healthcare systems that can address both physical and mental health needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings of this paper emphasize the need for holistic public health policies that not only address the medical treatment of mental health conditions but also tackle the underlying social factors contributing to mental health disparities. Policymakers must recognize that

mental health is shaped by broader social, economic, and environmental conditions. To effectively address the global burden of mental health disorders, it is essential to adopt a social determinants approach that focuses on:

1. **Reducing Poverty and Inequality:** Social policies aimed at reducing poverty, improving economic opportunities, and addressing income inequality will have a significant impact on improving mental health outcomes. This includes initiatives to promote fair wages, job security, and access to social welfare programs.
2. **Investing in Education:** Expanding access to quality education, particularly for marginalized groups, will contribute to better mental health outcomes. Education serves as a preventive measure by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate social challenges and seek mental health support when necessary.
3. **Improving Employment Conditions:** Governments and employers should prioritize the mental health of workers by improving job quality, ensuring fair wages, and addressing the challenges faced by workers in precarious employment. Policies such as paid family leave, flexible working hours, and mental health programs at the workplace can help reduce work-related stress and promote well-being.
4. **Ensuring Housing Stability:** Providing access to stable, affordable, and healthy housing is a fundamental step in improving mental health, particularly for vulnerable populations. Governments should invest in affordable housing programs, support homeless individuals with housing-first initiatives, and ensure that housing standards meet health and safety requirements.
5. **Promoting Social Inclusion:** Policies aimed at reducing social isolation and discrimination are crucial for promoting mental health. This includes promoting diversity and inclusion, reducing stigma around mental illness, and providing opportunities for social engagement, particularly for vulnerable groups such as immigrants, minorities, and individuals with mental health conditions.
6. **Global Cooperation:** Given the global disparities in mental health, it is imperative that nations collaborate to address the social determinants of mental health. International organizations such as the WHO, UN, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must continue to advocate for the integration of mental health into global health agendas and support capacity-building efforts in LMICs to strengthen mental health systems.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into the social determinants of mental health, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Language Bias:** The review primarily includes studies published in English which may limit the representation of perspectives from non-English-speaking regions. Future research could benefit from incorporating literature in other languages to provide a more comprehensive global perspective.
2. **Geographic Bias:** While global in scope, the majority of studies reviewed were from high-income countries, particularly in Europe and North America. This reflects the greater focus on mental health research in these regions and may underrepresent the experiences of populations in LMICs. Further research focused specifically on LMICs is necessary to better understand the local dynamics of SDMH in these regions.

3. **Publication Bias:** Like many systematic reviews, this study may be subject to publication bias, where studies with significant findings are more likely to be published. This may result in an overrepresentation of certain topics or findings in the literature.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The global perspective on the social determinants of mental health (SDMH) reveals that mental health is profoundly influenced by a wide array of social factors, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and social inclusion. These factors not only shape individual well-being but also contribute to the broader mental health landscape in diverse global contexts. While the relationship between social determinants and mental health is complex and multifaceted, it is clear that addressing these determinants can significantly improve mental health outcomes and promote healthier, more resilient societies. Disparities in these determinants across regions highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both the social and healthcare needs of vulnerable populations. Comprehensive public health strategies that prioritize mental health promotion, reduce inequalities, and ensure access to care for all individuals are essential for building resilient societies and reducing the global mental health burden.

Future research should continue to explore the complex interplay between social determinants and mental health, particularly in underserved populations and regions with limited mental health resources. By expanding our understanding of how social factors influence mental health, we can develop more effective policies and interventions that promote mental well-being and reduce disparities across the globe.

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