

# The Impact of Social Disparities on Public Health: An Analysis of Service Access, Quality of Life, and Policy Solutions

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## ABSTRACT

Social disparities in public health are a global issue that impacts access to medical services, life expectancy, and social well-being. Economic disparities, inequitable health policies, and other social factors worsen the health conditions of low-income communities. This study aims to analyze the impact of social disparity on the quality of public health and evaluate the urgency of further research to address this disparity. The literature review was used to examine current research on the relationship between socio-economic factors and public health. Data was collected from relevant international journals using a rigorous selection method based on the credibility and relevance of the findings. The results show that low-income communities have limited access to quality health services, leading to increased rates of chronic diseases and decreased psychosocial well-being. Health policies that do not consider socio-economic factors often exacerbate disparities in the healthcare system. More inclusive health policies, broader health education programs, and multisectoral collaboration are needed to reduce these disparities. The evidence-based approach taken in this study is expected to achieve a more equitable and sustainable health system.

## INTRODUCTION

Public health is an important indicator for assessing social well-being in a country. Social disparities have been shown to be a major factor affecting the health status of people globally. Disparities in income distribution, access to health services, and other social factors lead to significant differences in life expectancy, disease prevalence, and quality of life (Watkinson et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that countries with high social disparity tend to have higher mortality rates and greater rates of chronic disease than countries with a more equitable distribution of wealth (Stein & Galea, 2020).

Social disparities in health are evident in access to medical services and health facilities. Low-income communities in many countries have limited access to proper health care, either due to high costs, limited health insurance, or unequal distribution of health facilities. Studies show that in countries with large economic disparities, access to clean water,

good nutrition, and a healthy environment is increasingly limited for the poor, which in turn increases the risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease (Hao et al., 2021). These access limitations are not only present in developing countries, but also in developed countries, where minority and low-income communities have a lower life expectancy than wealthier communities (Liadova, 2021).

Social disparities also have an impact on people's mental health. Studies have shown that individuals living in social disparities are more susceptible to stress, anxiety and depression due to economic pressures and uncertainty about the future (Eckersley, 2015). Individuals with low social status in many countries experience discrimination in mental health services, which worsens their psychological condition. This disparity is further exacerbated by the lack of public policies that support mental health services for low-income communities (Hermann, 2016).

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Social disparities in the health sector are a multidimensional problem that has long been of concern to researchers and policy makers. Differences in socio-economic status not only determine an individual's level of access to health services, but also influence environmental factors related to public health (Arpey et al., 2017). Several studies have shown that social disparities in community are correlated with high rates of chronic diseases and premature mortality (Liadova, 2021). Individuals with low social status tend to have shorter life expectancy than those in higher social strata in countries with high economic disparity (Lyadova, 2020).

One of the key issues of social disparities in health is unequal access to quality healthcare. Individuals from low-income communities face significant barriers to proper health care, both due to financial limitations and geographical limitations to access medical facilities (Iazar & Davenport, 2018). Studies show that low-income communities are more likely to experience difficulties in obtaining preventive care, leading to increased rates of disease complications later in life (Bekken, 2018). This limitation is further exacerbated by the lack of policy support that favors vulnerable communities in the public health care system (Pescosolido, 2015).

Economic and social factors also contribute to significant quality of life differences between the better-off and those in poverty (Beech et al., 2021; Fulmer et al., 2021). Individuals with low education tend to have higher-stress jobs, greater risk of work accidents, and limited access to health insurance. These disparities make communities with lower education more vulnerable to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Gagné & Ghenadenik, 2018). Individuals with lower social status often experience discrimination in health services, which further worsens their health conditions (Wallack, 2019).

Another problem that arises from social disparities in health is the increasing rate of preventable diseases, such as tuberculosis, diabetes and other infectious diseases. The underprivileged, especially those living in poor or remote areas, often do not have sufficient access to basic health services, vaccinations, and preventive health checks (Assada et al., 2013). Lack of access to accurate health information and low awareness of maintaining a healthy lifestyle are factors that exacerbate this situation (Anderson et al., 2018). Environmental factors, such as air pollution and limited sanitation, which are more prevalent among the poor, also have a direct impact on the increased incidence of chronic diseases in poor populations (Kostyuk, 2020).

Studies also show that social disparities in health are not only caused by economic factors, but also by public policies that do not prioritize vulnerable communities. Health policies in many countries tend to focus on service efficiency without considering the impact on the poor and social minorities. This has led to most public health programs being ineffective in addressing health disparities between social communities (Blacksher, 2017). A health system that favors the private sector exacerbates this disparity, as there are fewer subsidies for low-income communities to receive proper health services (Engel & Martin, 2015).

Social disparities in health are not just a matter of economics and access to medical services, but also a moral and policy issue that has far-reaching impacts on the well-being of community as a whole. Research shows that countries with high economic disparity tend to experience an increase in premature mortality and a decline in the quality of public health due to low access to adequate health resources (Stein & Galea, 2020). Disparities in health not only impact the poor, but also affect total social stability with increased health costs, social burdens and pressure on public health systems (Mugabi, 2016).

One of the main reasons why social disparities in health need to be observed is because of their impact on the effectiveness of public health policies. Studies show that many health interventions that are supposed to reduce disparities actually exacerbate them due to implementation that does not consider the socio-economic factors of vulnerable communities (Gagné & Ghenadenik, 2018). Without an understanding of the factors that influence social disparity, policies could potentially be ineffective at reducing disparity or even make things worse for disadvantaged communities (Penman-Aguilar et al., 2016). Further research on the dynamics of social disparity and its impact on health is needed to support more inclusive and evidence-based policy formulation (Campos-Matos et al., 2019).

The urgency of research on social disparities in health is also increasing due to globalization and rapid urbanization. Disparities in global health systems have been exacerbated by rapid social and economic change, especially in developing countries, where access to health services is increasingly limited for marginalized communities (Birn et al., 2017). Research also shows that social disparities in health have an intergenerational impact, with children from poor families tending to experience poorer health than children from better-off families (Bekken, 2018; Willson & Shuey, 2019). This suggests that health disparities are not just a current problem, but will also affect future generations, requiring sustainable and evidence-based solutions.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between social disparity and access to health services across different communities. This research is expected to provide insights into the key challenges faced by vulnerable communities in obtaining appropriate medical services by understanding how socio-economic factors affect access to health services.

This research aims to identify the impact of social disparities on the quality of people's health, both in physical and mental aspects. Through a comprehensive literature review, this research will explore how economic, educational and social environmental factors contribute to differences in life expectancy, chronic disease prevalence and mental health levels between social communities.

This research also aims to highlight the urgency and relevance of studying social disparities in public health. By examining health policies that have been implemented in various countries, this research will evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used to reduce disparities in health access and propose evidence-based approaches that can be adopted by policymakers to create a more inclusive and equitable health system for all levels of community.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a literature review approach to analyze the relationship between social disparity and public health. Literature study, or literature review, is a research method that collects and analyzes information from various written sources to gain an understanding of a particular topic (Kumar, 2019). This approach allows researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps in the existing literature, as well as build a strong theoretical basis for future research.

The research process began with a comprehensive literature search with keywords used including "social disparities," "public health," "healthcare access," and "social determinants of health." Inclusion criteria were set to select relevant studies, including publications in English and Indonesian, as well as research published within the last ten years. This systematic approach ensured that the sources collected were of high quality and relevance (Creswell, 2014).

The next stage is a critical evaluation of the sources. This evaluation includes an assessment of the research methodology, the validity of the findings, and the relevance of the study context to the topic under study. According to Hart (1998), critical analysis of the literature helps researchers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies, as well as determine areas that require further research. This evaluation also helps to avoid duplication of research and ensure the original contribution of the study.

The final stage of this method is the synthesis of findings from various sources to answer the formulated research questions. This synthesis is done by identifying key themes, debates, and gaps in the existing literature. According to Cooper (2010), effective literature synthesis allows researchers to integrate information from various studies into a coherent and comprehensive conclusion. The results of this synthesis are then used to develop policy recommendations or interventions aimed at reducing social disparities in public health.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Relationship Between Social Disparities and Access to Health Services in Communities**

Social disparities in the community have a significant impact on access to health services. Access to quality medical services is not only determined by geographical factors, but also by one's socio-economic status. Studies show that individuals from lower socio-economic communities often experience limitations in accessing health services due to economic barriers, lack of health infrastructure in certain areas, and limited information about available health services (Guimarães et al., 2019; Gulliford, 2020). These disparities exacerbate the health conditions of economically disadvantaged communities.

Further research suggests that social disparities in access to healthcare contribute to disparities in the diagnosis and treatment of various chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension. For example, in a study addressing disparities in diabetes care, it was found that individuals from lower economic communities were less likely to receive advanced treatment technologies, such as insulin pumps, than individuals from higher income communities (Barnard-Kelly & Chernavvsky, 2020). This discrepancy is due to the high cost of care and limited health insurance coverage, which in turn contributes to lower levels of disease control in the poorer sections of community.

Disparities in access to health services is also influenced by the concept of equality of opportunity, which distinguishes between disparities caused by individual efforts and disparities stemming from social circumstances that cannot be controlled by individuals (Gómez et al., 2021). A study conducted by Jusot and Tubeuf (2019) showed that factors such as social background and geographical location have a significant impact on a person's chances of obtaining proper health services. Disparities stemming from circumstances that cannot be controlled by individuals should be the main focus of public health policy.

Access to health services in developing countries is often worse for people living in remote areas than those in urban areas. The main factors influencing this are inadequate infrastructure in remote areas, such as limited transportation, underdeveloped health facilities, and limited availability of medical personnel. This makes people in remote areas more vulnerable to health problems that are not properly addressed (Russell et al., 2013). Studies conducted in Brazil show that there are significant differences in access to health services between urban and rural communities. Despite improvements in equitable health access, people with lower education levels and living in rural areas still experience greater barriers to medical care than other communities (Viacava et al., 2019). This suggests that social, economic and geographical factors interact to create disparities in healthcare access.

Disparities in access to health services also impact the long-term health of the population. Lack of access to preventive services and early screening leads to an increased prevalence of preventable diseases, which in turn increases the economic burden on the country to deal with more complex health conditions. Unequal access to healthcare worsens the health conditions of the poor and contributes to increased mortality from preventable diseases (Arruda et al., 2018). The poor tend to be more vulnerable to disease due to limited access to good nutrition, adequate shelter, and adequate health services (Thompson et al., 2012). Fair and equitable access to health services is a key factor in improving the health of the population equally.

Social disparities in access to health services are also influenced by a country's health policy system. Disparities persist despite universal health coverage. A study on disparities in Indonesia's national health insurance system (JKN) shows that although JKN aims to improve health access for all levels of community, geographical barriers and health facility capacity are still major obstacles to achieving equitable service delivery (Kharisma, 2020). Health policy needs to consider aspects of medical facility distribution and infrastructure readiness to ensure more equitable access.

The relationship between social disparities and healthcare access is complex and involves a variety of factors, including economics, geography, policy and social status. Disparities in healthcare access can lead to significant differences in people's health status, increase the incidence of chronic diseases, and worsen long-term health conditions for vulnerable communities. Efforts to address these disparities should involve more inclusive health policies, more equitable provision of health services, and interventions designed to improve access for disadvantaged communities.

### **The Impact of Social Disparities on the Quality of Public Health**

Social disparities have a significant impact on the quality of people's health as they affect various aspects of life, including access to health services, the living environment, and the level of social stress experienced by individuals. Research shows that countries with higher levels of social disparities tend to have lower life expectancy and higher prevalence of chronic diseases than countries with a more equitable distribution of wealth (Eckersley, 2015). Economic and social disparities also contribute to poor community's limited access to quality health services, which in turn exacerbates disparities in people's health status (Castro, 2018).

The impact of social disparities in health is increasingly seen in the distribution of chronic diseases. Studies show that individuals with low-income levels are more likely to experience diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease due to lack of access to preventive medical services and health education (Pescosolido, 2015). This leads to late diagnosis and suboptimal treatment, which worsens their health condition over time. Other factors such as limited access to nutritious food and poor living environments also exacerbate the health conditions of low-income communities, leading to disparities in life expectancy between different social communities (Soeung et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2015). This also contributes to disparities in life expectancy between different social communities.

Social disparities also affect people's mental health. Individuals living in lower social conditions are more vulnerable to stress, anxiety and depression due to economic pressures and limited access to mental health services (Stein & Galea, 2020). This lack can hinder the ability of individuals to get the care they need, leading to a worsening of their mental state, and prolonging their suffering (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Uncertain social environments and lack of psychosocial support further exacerbate the mental state of individuals from lower economic communities, which in turn can impact work productivity and overall quality of life.

The impact of social disparities on health can also be seen in differences in access to technology-based health services and medical innovations. Individuals from higher economic communities have greater access to the latest health technologies, such as genetic therapies and artificial intelligence-based medicine, while individuals from lower economic communities still rely on basic health services that are often suboptimal (Hermann, 2016). This further widens the disparity in health status between social communities and exacerbates disparities in life expectancy.



Disparities in access to healthcare also impact infant and maternal mortality rates, especially in developing countries. Studies show that countries with high levels of economic disparity have higher maternal mortality rates than countries with better welfare systems (Lapalme et al., 2020). The main cause of this disparity is limited access to maternal health services, including a lack of trained medical personnel and adequate health facilities in poor areas. Efforts to reduce disparities in access to healthcare, including improving health infrastructure and training medical personnel, are critical to reducing maternal and infant mortality in developing countries (Ruiz et al., 2015).

Social disparities also have far-reaching consequences for the health system as a whole. Disparities in access to healthcare lead to an increased economic burden on the state due to rising healthcare costs for the less well-off. This disparity also leads to an increased number of patients requiring emergency health services due to a lack of prior preventive measures (Cushing et al., 2015). The burden on the national health system will further increase and worsen the overall quality of health services if social disparities in health are not properly addressed.

The long-term impact of social disparities in health reflects the need for more inclusive and equitable health policies. Disparities in access to health services not only create a greater health burden for the poor and marginalized, but also contribute to broader social disparities. Governments and global health organizations need to focus on interventions that target vulnerable communities, such as providing universal health insurance and improving health infrastructure in disadvantaged areas. Measures such as subsidizing health services for the poor and social justice-based health policies can also help reduce health disparities in community (Howarth et al., 2019). The negative impact of social disparities on the quality of public health can be minimized with a more equitable and comprehensive approach.

### **The Importance of Assessing and Understanding Social Disparities in Public Health**

Social disparities in public health are an issue of growing concern in global research due to their far-reaching impact on individual well-being and social stability. Research shows that disparities in healthcare access, quality of medical care, and social determinants of health can worsen societal conditions. Understanding the factors that cause and exacerbate social disparities in health is an essential step towards developing more equitable and effective health policies (Liadova, 2021).

One of the main reasons for studying social disparities in health is to identify the social and economic factors that contribute to health disparities across different communities. Studies show that factors such as income, education, and employment conditions have a significant influence on a person's health status. Research conducted by Riley (2020) emphasizes that the social stratification system in a community can be a major factor that determines the quality of health of individuals as well as certain communities. Those at the bottom often face barriers to accessing quality medical care, whether due to financial limitations, lack of knowledge, or inability to communicate with an often complicated and unwelcoming health system.

Understanding social disparities in health is also important to highlight how public policies can contribute to addressing or exacerbating these disparities. Health policies that do not consider socio-economic factors can lead to increased disparities in access to medical services between low-income and better-off communities (Essien et al., 2021). For example, research conducted in the European Union shows that health policies based on social justice principles have an important role to play in reducing health disparities between member states (Bsoul-Kopowska, 2019).

Research on social disparities in health enables the identification of communities in society that are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of these disparities. Vulnerable communities such as the elderly, ethnic minorities, and low-income individuals often face greater barriers to accessing quality healthcare. A study by Gagné and Ghenadenik (2018) shows that social disparities in health stem not only from economic factors, but also from the underrepresentation of vulnerable communities in health policy-making processes.

The study of social disparities in health can help in the development of more effective and evidence-based intervention models. Governments and health institutions can design programs that better suit the needs of disadvantaged communities by understanding the factors that influence disparities in health. Research by Lyadova (2020) highlights that community-based interventions tailored to the socio-economic characteristics of specific communities have great potential to reduce disparities in health.

Research on social disparities in health also has important implications for public financial planning. Disparities in access to health services can increase the long-term health cost burden for countries due to high rates of preventable diseases. A study by Howarth et al. (2019) revealed that investing in more inclusive and equitable health policies can significantly reduce national health costs and increase labor productivity.

The study of social disparities in public health has a major impact on various aspects of social and economic life (McGowan et al., 2021). Social disparities in health not only affect individuals' quality of life, but also affect economic productivity, increase the burden of healthcare financing, and exacerbate broader social disparities. Understanding the causes, impacts and ways to address these disparities can help to design more effective and equitable policies. Governments, academics and health practitioners can jointly develop sustainable solutions with evidence-based approaches to address health disparities, ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to obtain quality health services.

## CONCLUSION

Social disparities in public health are complex issues that have far-reaching impacts on access to health services, life expectancy, and individual and community well-being. Studies show that disparities in income distribution, education, and public policies contribute to significant differences in health quality between social communities. Low-income and vulnerable communities tend to have limited access to appropriate medical care, leading to increased rates of chronic disease, mental stress and premature death. Non-inclusive health policies often exacerbate these disparities, rather than reducing them. Understanding the relationship between social disparity and health is critical to building a more equitable, just and sustainable health system.

Equitable access to health services is a key step to addressing social disparities that impact on public health. The government needs to ensure that health facilities are evenly distributed, especially in remote areas and low-income communities. Providing health subsidies and improving medical service infrastructure must be prioritized so that all levels of community can obtain proper and quality health services without being burdened by financial or geographical constraints.

Health policies should be evidence-based, taking into account the social determinants that affect people's well-being. These social determinants play an important role in determining the health of individuals and communities, as they influence access to health services, health behaviors, and broader living conditions. Policies that do not take into account economic and social factors risk widening existing disparities. Periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of health policies that have been implemented is needed so that the interventions carried out actually benefit the community groups most in need. Policy formulation can be directed towards creating a more equitable and inclusive health system with an approach based on data and academic research.

Education and raising public awareness about health are also important aspects to address this disparity. One of the major challenges faced by less educated communities is the lack of understanding about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, regular health check-ups and utilization of preventive services. More widespread and effective campaigns on this subject are needed to improve knowledge and healthy habits among these communities. Access to accurate health information must be improved so that people can make informed decisions regarding their health. Proper and easy-to-understand information will enable individuals to be more proactive in taking care of their health and taking the necessary steps to prevent disease. This education also needs to include an understanding of health rights so that individuals can be more active in demanding access to proper health services. This will help reduce the prevalence of preventable diseases and improve their quality of life in the long-term.

It is also important to include mental health in public health policies more systematically. Stigmatization of mental health disorders remains a major obstacle to the treatment of psychological problems in many countries, especially for economically disadvantaged communities who often do not have access to adequate mental health services. This stigma often causes individuals suffering from mental illness to feel ashamed or afraid to seek help, especially for those from low economic communities. Individuals who are stigmatized tend to shut down and avoid treatment, which worsens their condition in the long-term. The government must ensure that mental health services are affordable and accessible to all people without discrimination. Individuals from all social backgrounds can get the support they need to maintain their psychological well-being.

Multi-sectoral collaboration between government, academia, private sector, and civil community organizations is necessary to address disparities in public health. Each sector has a unique and complementary role in creating more inclusive and sustainable solutions. A multi-stakeholder approach allows for synergies to create more inclusive and sustainable health programs. Private companies can contribute by providing health services to workers and surrounding communities, while non-governmental organizations can assist in advocacy and provision of health services in less affordable areas. The implementation of strong cooperation between various sectors, it is hoped that the solutions implemented will not only be short-term but also sustainable to reduce existing health disparities.

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