



Mental Health and Social Factors: A Social Science Approach



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Abstract

Mental health is an essential component of human well-being and is closely influenced by social factors. Among the main determinants are poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, and social stigma, which increase the risk of disorders such as depression and anxiety. The objective was to understand how the social sciences influence mental health through the social factors present in any society. The research was qualitative. A literature review was conducted, and the inductive-deductive method was applied, with a descriptive approach. The conclusion is that the social sciences are essential in studies of mental health in society.

Keywords

Disorders;
Poverty;
Psychologies;
Social problems;

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Introduction

Mental health is an essential component of human well-being and social development. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) recognizes that comprehensive health does not exist without mental health, as it directly influences people's quality of life and productivity. However, mental disorders cannot be understood solely from a biomedical perspective, as social factors such as poverty, unemployment, violence, and gender inequality decisively influence their emergence and prevalence. In this context, the social sciences provide theoretical and methodological frameworks to analyze the relationship between mental health and social determinants, enabling the design of more inclusive and effective public policies (Ferguson et al., 2011).

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Materials and Methods

The research is of a qualitative type, for which a bibliographic or bibliographic review was carried out. Based on the review and analysis of existing scientific literature (articles, reports from the WHO, Paho), the inductive-deductive method was applied, a type of qualitative research, which is applied when exploring experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to mental health in different social contexts.

Analysis and Discussion of the Results

Various investigations show that poverty and social exclusion are risk factors for the development of depressive and anxiety disorders. According to [Patel et al. \(2018\)](#), economic insecurity increases chronic stress, limits access to health services, and generates feelings of hopelessness, creating a vicious cycle between poverty and poor mental health.

Another determining factor is unemployment, which not only affects financial stability but also identity and self-esteem. Studies in Latin America show that unemployed young people have higher levels of anxiety and depression than those with stable jobs ([Pan American Health Organization \[PAHO\], 2020](#)).

Gender violence is also a critical variable. Women who experience physical, psychological, or sexual violence are up to three times more likely to develop anxiety disorders or depression ([Devries et al., 2013](#)). This demonstrates how mental health is not an individual matter, but rather a reflection of unequal social structures.

Economic and job insecurity generate chronic stress and limit access to health services, while violence and structural inequalities particularly affect vulnerable groups, such as women and young people. Furthermore, cultural beliefs and stigmatization make it difficult to seek professional help, deepening exclusion. In this sense, understanding mental health from a social science perspective allows for the design of more comprehensive public policies and community strategies that address not only clinical treatment but also the social determinants that influence psychological well-being ([Zoellner & Maercker, 2006](#)). Table 1 shows the social factors that influence social health.

Table 1
Social factors that influence mental health

Factor social	Behavior / Effect on mental health	Example
Poverty	It increases chronic stress, creates economic insecurity, and limits access to health services.	Families living in poverty have higher rates of depression and anxiety.
Unemployment	It affects self-esteem, identity, and generates feelings of hopelessness.	Unemployed young people with anxiety symptoms in urban contexts.
Gender violence	It causes psychological trauma, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress.	Women victims of violence are three times more likely to suffer from depression.
Social stigma	It reinforces discrimination and isolation, making it difficult to seek professional help.	People with depression who avoid going to psychologists for fear of rejection.
Social inequality	It limits equitable access to health resources and services, creating gaps in well-being.	Rural communities without access to specialized mental health services.
Culture and beliefs	It influences the way we understand mental health and our willingness to accept treatment.	In some communities, depression is interpreted as a "lack of faith" rather than a clinical disorder.

Source: [\(Jaramillo et al., 2019\)](#), [\(Tejeda & Burgos, 2020\)](#), [\(Ponte et al., 2023\)](#), [\(Ramos, 2023\)](#), [\(Abramo et al., 2020\)](#), [\(Campo-Arias et al., 2021\)](#)

Finally, the community and cultural contexts influence the perception and treatment of mental health. In some communities, stigma toward those suffering from psychological disorders persists, limiting the search for professional help and exacerbating social exclusion (Corrigan et al., 2014). Therefore, culturally tailored awareness-raising strategies are needed.

Conclusion

The relationship between mental health and social factors highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach that combines biomedicine with the social sciences. Understanding that poverty, unemployment, violence, and social stigma are determinants of mental health allows for more equitable public policies and more effective community intervention strategies to ensure that mental health is not only a clinical treatment but also a social transformation that promotes equity and justice.

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