
Health, Wealth & Poverty

Module 4 • i2P • Expedition India



Source: [Ken Wieland](#)

Take Home Points

- Social determinants of health are conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.
- The conditions in which people live have a significant impact on their health
- Poverty is a significant driver of poor health, and early death.

“The first wealth is health”

~Ralph Waldo Emerson



TOPIC

This module takes a look at the link between health, wealth and poverty.

WEALTH & POVERTY

Although the United Nation upholds health as a universal right, equal access to health is not uniform around the world. One of the principal factors that drives inequality in health care is disparity of wealth. People who live in poverty are far more likely to have

Definition: Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as: A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

poor health
and to die

prematurely compared to people who are wealthy. Indeed the population of wealthy countries has better health outcomes than the population of impoverished nations.

According to the World Health Organization:

“The probability of a man dying between the ages of 15 and 60 is 8.2% in Sweden (wealthy country), 48.5% in the Russian Federation (mid-range wealth), and 84.5% in Lesotho (Impoverished country)”,

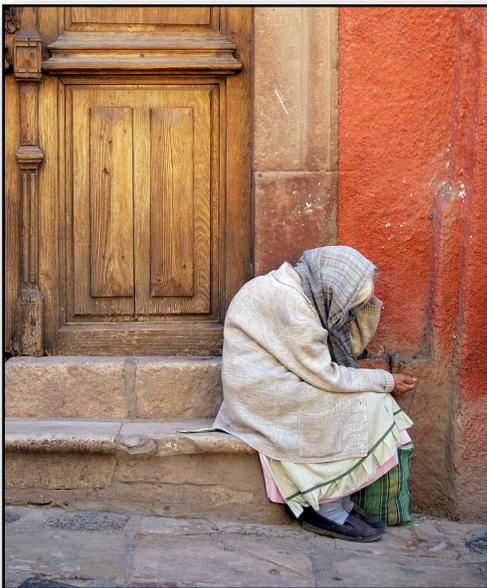


Figure 1: An elderly woman on a doorstep (source [Tomas Castelazo](#))

and,

“A child born in Japan (wealth country) has a chance of living 43 years longer than a child born in Sierra Leone (poor country).”

In short the lower an individual's socioeconomic position the worse on average their health will be (see: [World Health Organization](#)).

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions are shaped by a number of factors, important among them the distribution of money. People with greater wealth tend to have better health care, than those with less wealth. Similarly countries with greater wealth (developed countries) tend to have better health care systems than poorer nations.

Did You Know?

Poor health can cause poverty

In India, some 80% of all spending on health care is now private, excluding many from accessing it. Only one in 10 citizens of India has any form of health insurance. Out-of-pocket payments for medical care amount to 98.4% of total health expenditures by households, according to the PricewaterhouseCoopers study, which estimates that 20 million people in India fall below the poverty line each year because of indebtedness due to health-care needs.

Source: [poverty](#)



Figure 2: Water from the sacred River Ganges (source: [Steve Evans](#))

There are a variety of manners in which poverty has a negative impact on health:

1. Food

People in poor countries, or those living in poverty have greater difficulty obtaining enough quality food. Poor quality food, or a lack of food leads to illness, malnourishment and a host of other illnesses

2. Water

People who live in poverty tend not to have more difficulty accessing clean water. Just as clean water is essential to health, dirty or polluted water is a significant vector of disease. Thus people who live in poverty are far more frequently exposed to disease through polluted sources of water, or in some cases become ill

because of an inability to access water. According to the World Health Organization, “In 2002, nearly 11 million children died before reaching their fifth birthday – 98% of these deaths were in developing countries”. Many of these deaths result from a lack of clean water in poor nations.



3. Air

Air quality in poorer nations with a lack of industrial regulation can be poor, leading to the development of respiratory illness.

4. Housing & Sanitation

Poverty leads to poor housing, overcrowding and poor sanitation systems. All of these factors contribute to the spread of disease, illness and death.

	India	Canada	USA
GDP World Rank	5	15	2
GDP Per Capita	\$3500	\$39 400	\$47 200
GDP Per Capita (World Rank)	163	22	11
%GDP Spent on Health Care	4.2%	10%	16%
% of infants immunized	66%	80%	95%
Infant Mortality / 1000 children	47.57 Rank:52	4.92 Rank:184	6.06 Rank:177
Life Expectancy	66.8 Rank:161	81.38 Rank:12	78.37 Rank:50

Table 1: Comparison of the cost and quality of health care in India, Canada, and the United States. GDP = Gross Domestic Product. The United States spends much more on health care than Canada and India. Infant mortality is much higher in India.

5. Health care services

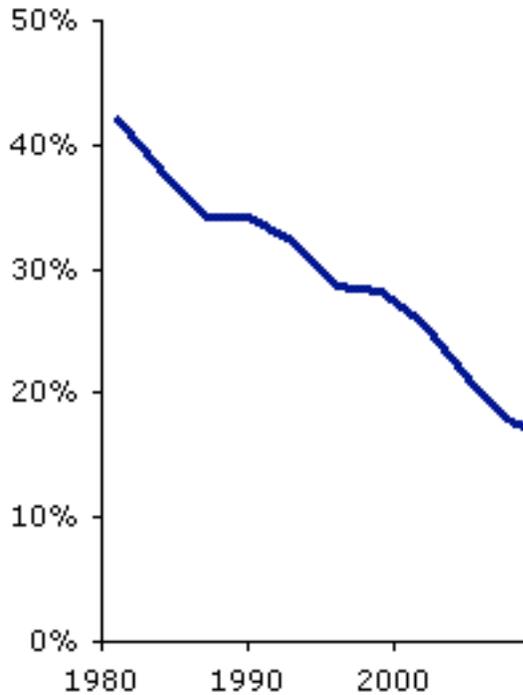
Poorer countries often have inadequate health care services such as hospitals, clinics and pharmacies. A lack of medical services means that people who become ill may not be able to be treated which may lead to further illness and death.

6. Cost of health care

In some countries there may be adequate health services, but these can only be accessed for a fee. Those living in poverty may be unable to afford health care, thereby becoming ill and dying with greater frequency.

7. Infrastructure

Low income countries often



Did You Know?

Many Doctors in India are not qualified as physicians. In the Indian health private sector ‘doctors’ are often untrained and largely unregulated. According to a study, 41 percent of those who called themselves “doctors” do not have a medical degree, 18 percent have no medical training whatsoever, and 17 percent have not graduated from high school.”

Source: [Doctors in India](#)

Figure 3: The percentage of world population in extreme poverty as defined by the World Bank (\$1.25 per day). Note that the number of people in extreme poverty is falling steadily since 1980. (source: [Jacob Lundberg](#))

have poorer infrastructure such as roads, and communication systems. This contributes to greater difficulty moving ill people to health care services and to greater road deaths. According to the World Health organization, “Low- and middle-income countries account for 85% of the world’s road deaths.”

School Exercise

Establish the availability and use of the following basic health services in your community:

- Is an infant or child immunization program available in your community?
- If not, what is the reason?
- If so, what is the cost of this program for users?
- Out of the total possible, how many infants or children are actually immunized by the program?
- Why is the answer to the above question not 100%?