Abstract

Throughout history people have needed the sense of belonging and support offered by communities. Today, however, societies are governed more by individualism, resulting in a weakening of the sense of community. Although there are areas where communities are thriving, loss of community is seen in many parts of the world. Despite these trends, I argue that having a sense of community is essential for a society to not only do well, but also survive during challenging times. In this paper, I examine the concept of community as a social determinant of health and the benefits a person receives from having a community.

Having a supportive community conveys a sense of belonging, confidence, and purpose, among a number of other important social and psychological aspects. Being part of a community can be rewarding, and studies have shown that a number of social, psychological, and health benefits come from it. Many of these rewards and benefits apply to people of all ages living in environments where community is central to lived experience. Simply put, people living in supportive communities live longer and healthier lives, and crime rates are lower in neighborhoods where neighbors know each other well.

Keywords: belonging, community, health, social determinants of health, support

Purpose

The purpose of this work is twofold: to reawaken a sense of community, and to outline the benefits that come with having a community and a feeling of belonging. This is done by looking at the following points:

1) How community is defined
2) Community as a social determinant of health
3) Why community is important today

Background

It is a common misconception, mainly in Western cultures, that good health is about leading a healthy lifestyle: eating clean, exercising regularly, having access to healthcare, and the like. From a systems thinking perspective, good health is the result of a number of factors that relate to each other on a daily basis. In fact, our health is also determined in part by access to social and economic opportunities; the resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities; the quality of our schooling; the safety of our workplaces; the cleanliness of our water, food, and air; and the nature of our social interactions and relationships. Agreeably, our good or bad health is the result of numerous factors that interact in our lives and everyone of them plays a significant role, and the human need for social determinants like community should not be viewed as an insignificant one.

Systems Approach

If we, the human race, are going to attempt to make any advancements in the improvement of our health, it is time to examine people, their environment, and their interactions with the world as a whole and a good start is to look at the community they live in.

Future research should look at present as well as past examples of successful communities, their strengths and weaknesses, in order to better understand the various dimensions of this social determinant of health that I consider key to our survival.

Future Directions

References


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