Unit 4. Understanding Individuals within Environments

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THEORETICAL LESSONS

- Unit 1. Introducing Psychology of Social and Community Intervention.
- Unit 2. Community research.
- Unit 3. Methods of Community Research.
- Unit 4. Understanding Individuals Within Environments.
- Unit 5. Understanding Community.
- Unit 6. Human Diversity in Contexts.
- Unit 7. Stress and Coping in Context.
- Unit 8. Prevention and Promotion.
- Unit 9. Promoting Community and Social Change.
CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

- Four ecological principles
- Social climate dimensions
- Social regularities
- Behaviour settings
- Activity settings
- Environmental psychology
Environments

FOUR ECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES


- INTERDEPENDENCE. Changes in one part can affect the others (sometimes unanticipated consequences).
- CYCLING OF RESOURCES. Pattern of exchange sharing in African American community (Stack, 1974).
- ADAPTATION. Transactions between person and environment.
- SUCCESION. Change over time.
How people experience and understand settings. Aggregated perceptions of individuals.

(Moos, 1973)

- RELATIONSHIPS. Supportiveness and cohesion.
- PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. Autonomy and skill development.
- SYSTEM MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE. Order, clarity of rules and expectations and control of behaviour.
Settings typically create predictable relationships among their members, and those qualities persist over time regardless of the individuals involved.

(Seidman, 1988, 1990)

- Routine patterns of social relations.
- Roles and power relationships.
In Ecological Psychology a behaviour setting is defined by having a place, time and a standing pattern of behaviour (regardless of which individuals were present) (Barker, 1968)

- Under-populated settings > deviation-countering circuits.
- Optimally populated settings > vetoing circuits.
Physical setting and behaviour setting but also subjective meanings and inter-subjectivities: beliefs, assumptions, values and emotional experiences shared by participants.

(O’Donnell et al., 1993)

- Takes subjective experiences and cultural meaning into account.
In lower risk neighbourhoods with better conditions, teens whose parents were less restrictive had higher grades (consistent with developmental psychology). But in higher-risk neighbourhoods, teens whose parents were more restrictive had higher grades.

Prenatal care and education about pregnancy reduces the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes (premature birth and low birth weight). But this reduction was less effective in neighbourhoods with high unemployment and high poverty rates.
Mental health and behavioural problems, delinquency, cardiovascular diseases and pregnancy problems are on average more common in neighbourhoods where many residents have low incomes.

In neighbourhoods with higher turnover, juvenile delinquency is more common.

Community disadvantage (unemployment, government assistance and less education) predicted rates of conduct problems among adolescent boys, while the proportion of single parent households predicted conduct problems among adolescent girls.
Neighbourhoods

Risky physical environments

- **Physical environment** can impact nutrition, physical activity and obesity.
- Lack sources of healthy food but liquor stores are abundant.
- **Housing of lower quality**, related to health consequences.
- **Overcrowded housing** is associated with psychological distress in children.
Levels of violence and incivilities. One quarter of US urban youth witness a murder in their lifetime.

- Exposure to violence is associated with posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and aggression and behaviour problems.

Physical incivilities: abandoned or dilapidated buildings, litter, vandalism, and graffiti. Social incivilities: public drunkenness, gang activities, and drug trade.

- Exposure to incivilities is associated with fear of crime, depression, anxiety, restrictive parenting, withdrawal from the community.
Neighbourhoods

Protective processes

- Larger proportion of long-term residents and owner-occupied housing. Relationships among residents and sense of community.

- Neighbourhoods with higher levels of community organization (more voters registered, greater participation in associations) had lower risk of problems with pregnancy. Also less risk is observed in areas with more community services, businesses and health care.

- Neighbourhoods with stronger social ties and support among residents had lower levels of child maltreatment.
Cooperative housing and citizen participation promote quality of life and personal well-being.

Citizen block associations had positive impacts on the block physical environment (improvements are more common).

The “community lodge”, an alternative setting for mental health patients. Residents govern themselves, promoting autonomy and development of residents.

The Harlem Children’s Zone, an alternative setting for children. Application of programs is not enough. Skill development, collaborative and empowerment manner.
Ecological concepts

 QUESTIONS

- Power and fragility of settings.
- Settings are dynamic and ever changing.
- Individuals and environments are related...
- And these relationships are affected by cultural and other social processes.
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