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Topic: Why is there an increased risk of health issues in people from low-income communities than people from high-income communities?

Part I: What I know/think/believe/have heard/have been taught and what I want to discover.

People from low-income communities have an increased risk of health issues. I believe this could be due to the fact that healthy foods are more expensive than unhealthy/ fast foods. This would make purchasing a meal from a fast food restaurant more convenient for a person in this neighborhood. Even if they are trying to be conscious of the nutrition in the foods they consume and try to change, they aren't capable of doing so due to their financial situation. I also believe that the lack of exposure to healthy foods can cause an increase in health issues. In other words, low-income communities tend to have more unhealthy fast food restaurants than healthy restaurants and grocery stores. Therefore, if a person does decide to go on a healthy diet, there aren't many options of places they can eat that will fit their diet. However, if one is choosing a restaurant without paying attention to the nutrition of the foods served, they will have many options on where to eat. This makes having a healthy diet less ideal for a low-income consumer. It also makes a healthy diet difficult to maintain. If a person is in a predicament where they are

only allowed to consume a narrow range of foods due to the lack of options, they'll tend to oppose this diet. If they decide to go on this diet they will eventually run out of options causing them to revert to the way that gives them various options which in a low-income neighborhood is an unhealthy diet. Hence, a healthy diet is difficult to maintain.

Part II: The Search (documenting the research process)

To find my three texts to annotate I went on ccny library and used the research database EBSCOhost. I searched (healthy food prices) AND (poor community or low-income or poverty) AND (fast food prices or unhealthy food price) to find my first text. It gave me 9 results and I chose "The economics of obesity: dietary energy density and energy cost" as my first text to annotate. I continued to use EBSCOhost to find my second text. For this search I typed (healthy diet cost) AND (low-income or poverty or low socioeconomic status or poor or low income or working class). There were 83 results and I chose the text "The cost of healthy diets: What guidelines for the working poor?" For my third text to annotate, I searched obesity linked to food insecurity. I came upon a website named the journal of nutrition and got my third text to annotate called "Food Insecurity is Associated with Increased Risk of Obesity in California Women." For my primary source I know that I wanted a paper on research and studies that show results as charts and tables to support my answer to my topic question which is "Why is there an increased risk of health issues in people from low-income communities than people from high-income communities?" I used google to search " prices of healthy and unhealthy foods. I found the text "The Relative Caloric Prices of Healthy and Unhealthy Foods Differ Systematically across Income Levels and Continents." The next source I wanted was a comparison between the prices

of a healthy diet and an unhealthy diet. I used google search and came upon a New York Times Article "A High Price for Healthy Food by Tara Parker-Pope." To narrow it down and analyze particular restaurants, I thought of the most popular fast-food spot which is McDonalds, and a place with a healthier menu which is Chipotle. I found a location where poverty rates are continuously increasing and came upon a Pdf of Dallas, Texas poverty update. It stated "the number of people in poverty in the City of Dallas has increased approximately 39.1%." Next, I wanted to find the amount of McDonald's and Chipotle restaurants in this low-income community Dallas, Texas. For this I checked the Chipotle website and clicked on the locations tab. Using google I searched "Number of Mcdonald locations. Found a website scrapehero that had the number of locations in Dalla, Texas. Since most of the essay will be comparing prices of healthy foods and unhealthy foods, I searched up the average price spent at these two locations during each visit. Using google I searched "amount spent at Chipotle vs. Mcdonald's and got a website from business insider where the average price spent at multiple restaurants were compared. Two of these restaurants were McDonald's and Chipotle. To find my last article I thought of ways in how these restaurants attract consumers in terms of advertising and deals. I searched McDonalds advertisement deals and clicked on the Mcdonald's website to find multiple coupons. Then I searched the same and found the rewards program on the Chipotle website.

Part III: What I learned

The United States of America is known as one of the most unhealthy countries due to our heavy reliance on fast-food. Other countries often associate us with being fat, overweight and obese. This connection goes back to historical times. In the past, Americans who were "fat" or

obese were considered to be wealthy. The more money you had meant the more meals you could

purchase. This is what contributed to your increased weight gain. Contrarily, in modern times

obesity is associated with poverty. Low-income communities tend to have an increased risk of

health conditions such as obesity, overweight and high-blood pressure. Many studies were

conducted with the aim of discovering why these already disadvantaged groups in our country

are faced with even more hardships. Common findings suggest price as a significant factor.

Studies found in low-income communities that healthy foods are expensive while unhealthy

fast-foods are inexpensive and affordable. In 2019, Mississippi had the highest poverty rate

(World Population Review). In Mississippi, Yazoo county reportedly has one of the lowest

poverty rates of 37.1% (Index mundi, Mississippi Poverty Rate) This county has 34.6% people

overweight, a 12.7% adult diabetes rate and a 36.4% adult obesity rate

(City-data.com/Mississippi). World Atlas states one of the wealthiest states in the U.S. is

Massachusetts. Dover, Massachusetts has 31.1 % people overweight, 7.1% adult diabetes rate

and a 19.1 % obesity rate (City-data.com/Massachusetts) proving that residents of low-income

regions have higher risks of health issues in relation to high-income regions. Obesity rates are

linked to low income and a higher incidence of poverty. Obesity rates were higher in

lower-income neighborhoods, legislative districts, and low-income states (The Economics of

Obesity). This unfortunate truth is emulated in the study of "food insecurity." Food insecurity is

the disruption of required food intake and eating patterns of individuals or groups due to the lack

of money and resources. A study stated those who were food insecure without hunger were 47%

more likely to be obese than the food secure, and the food insecure with hunger were 2.8 times as

likely to be obese (Adams, Grummer-Strawn, Chavez, 1072). The high obesity rates among the

food insecure was due to consumption of foods that cost less and had few fruits, vegetables and

other nutritional foods (Adams, Grummer-Strawn, Chavez, 1073). This confirms the connection of the term food insecurity with the consumption of unhealthy foods. The lack of nutrition in the foods consumed leads to malnutrition. The overeating of "junk foods" leads to obesity. Both conditions are likely to appear in people who are food insecure. There are people who are food insecure without hunger. Their income allows them to purchase meals that will suppress their hunger; these meals are junk foods. These price disparities between healthy and unhealthy foods in low-income communities cause an increased risk of health issues. (e.g. obesity)

Aren't unhealthy diets the main cause of obesity? How does economics relate to obesity? Based on your previous knowledge of obesity, these could be questions you're asking. While the lack of healthy diets causes obesity, determining *why* someone has an unhealthy diet and *why* it's popular in low-income communities is important. Research should start from the beginning. Discovering the root of a problem is an essential step of finding the solution. "Added sugars and fats are the lowest-cost sources of energy. Fish, vegetables, and fruit generally cost more" (The Economics of Obesity, Drewnowski, Darmon). Lower-costing foods are not only inexpensive but they're good tasting. These foods almost blind the public from the truth behind their detrimental health effects. A study was conducted to compare relative caloric prices of different food products across 176 countries. The results found that in low income communities dark-leafy vegetables, vitamin A-rich fruits & vegetables were categorized as very expensive (The Journal of Nutrition, Headey and Alderman). Some of these healthy foods were even more expensive in low-income regions than high-income regions. This price disparity between regions puts low-income consumers at a greater disadvantage by making healthy produce difficult for them to purchase.

Since, we know healthy foods are classified as expensive among low-income consumers you may ask "how much is spent on a healthy diet compared to an unhealthy diet?" A survey found " a 2,000-calorie diet of junk food would cost just $3.52 daily, compared with $36.32 daily for a diet of healthy foods" (The New York Times, Tara Parker-Pope). This price disparity between healthy and unhealthy foods will heavily influence the diet choices of low-income consumers. Tara introduces another aspect to the prices of the foods stating "as time progresses, low-calorie foods are likely to increase in price, by 19.5% over a 2 year period . High-calorie foods dropping by only 1.8%" (The New York Times, Tara Parker-Pope). As time proceeds, the prices of healthy foods are likely to rise and the prices of unhealthy foods are likely to lower making it increasingly difficult for low-income consumers to maintain a healthy diet and they'd continue the consumption of unhealthy food.

Another societal factor that contributes to low-income consumers having unhealthy diets is the quantity of restaurants in specific locations. To test this factor we must examine a location with a continuously increasing poverty rate. The mayor of Dallas, Texas poverty update, states "since 2000, in Dallas the amount of people in poverty increased 39.1%." We can use this low-income location to study the quantity of different restaurants within this area. McDonald's is one of the most popular fast-food places in the US. A restaurant known to offer customers healthier options is Chipotle. The chipotle website reveals that in Dallas, Texas, there are 20 chipotle restaurants. While the scrapehero website shows 66 McDonalds restaurants in Dallas, Texas. With the greater amount of McDonald's restaurants than Chipotle restaurants in Dallas, Texas it proves how in low-income areas unhealthy foods are overrepresented while healthy foods are underrepresented. Determining the amount of grocery stores in low-income areas compared to high-income areas to support this claim. In 2019, Mississippi had the highest

poverty rate (World Population Review). In Mississippi, Yazoo county reportedly has one of the

highest poverty rates of 37.1% (Index mundi, Mississippi Poverty Rate by County). This city has

7 grocery stores (City-Data.com). Madison County has a lower poverty rate of 9.4% (World

Population Review). This city has 12 grocery stores (City-Data.com). The lower-income

neighborhood has less grocery stores and healthy restaurants hence less availability of healthy

produce.

Along with the greater presence of unhealthy fast-food chains relative to healthy

restaurants in low-income regions, the advertising of deals between these restaurants are crucial

to consumer's health. The cost of food is one of the deciding factors of where low-income

consumers will purchase their meal. Therefore, what is the difference in price between

McDonald's and Chipotle? The results of a survey by Citi Research found on average, a

McDonalds customer spends $4.72 each visit and a Chipotle customer spends $11 each visit

(Lutz, Business Insider). This large price difference makes it more likely for a low-income

consumer to purchase a meal from McDonald's over Chipotle. The potential cause of

McDonald's low prices could be the deals they offer. On the McDonald's website they're

advertising "Buy 1 get 1 for a $1", "free sandwich with the app" and "$1 Large fries" deals.

Chipotle's website advertises its rewards program where you'll get 10 points for each $1 you

spend and each time you reach 1250 points you'll receive 1 free entree. McDonalds not only

offers more options but the deals can be used as frequently as they last. To receive the chipotle

deal, multiple purchases are required. Comparing the deals serve the purpose of reinforcing how

and why purchasing unhealthy meals are convenient for people in low-income neighborhoods.

With disregard of the caloric amount of each menu item, low-income consumers most likely

perceive McDonald's as offering more for less.

So far we have discussed price disparities and availability as the key factors of the increased health conditions in areas with high poverty rates. These factors are built in the economic and marketing system and provide additional disadvantages to an already underprivileged group. This fits into the category of "structural violence". Farmer describes this term as a person or group that is harmed due to social structures embedded in the system. In relation to the topic, the economic system creates a disadvantage for people with low-income to maintain a healthy diet. "The world's poor are the chief victims of structural violence. The poor are not only more likely more likely to suffer, they are also more likely to have their suffering silenced (Farmer, 280). Farmer also mentions poverty as the primary cause of many diseases, hunger and malnutrition among minorities (Farmer, 276). Similar to our studies, Farmer makes the link between poverty and health conditions. He also describes low-income consumers as "victims" of structural violence. Therefore, the "wrongdoer" would be the system that regulates the prices of goods and the availability of restaurants in an area.

As mentioned, discovering the root of a problem is mandatory when finding a solution. Farmer mentions this stating "if this silence is to be broken, identify the forces conspiring to promote suffering (Farmer, 280). Being that we have uncovered the origin of the issue we can now seek a solution. Price disparities and availability of healthy and unhealthy foods causes an increase of health issues in low-income communities. Therefore, by lowering the price and tax of healthy produce in grocery stores, these foods will be affordable for low-income consumers. Introducing more grocery stores and healthy restaurants in low-income neighborhoods will increase accessibility of these healthy foods. These solutions cater to the primary causes of the increased health issues in low-income areas. Consequently, removing or lessening the causes will hopefully solve the problem.

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Part IV: What I think about what I learned

Throughout my research process I found answers to my topic question. This question was "Why is there an increased risk of health issues in people from low-income communities than people from high-income communities?" I found the causes to be differences in availability and price of healthy and unhealthy foods. There tends to be more grocery stores and therefore, more access to healthy foods in high-income communities compared to low-income communities. Areas with a high poverty rate have less grocery stores and more unhealthy fast-foods than healthy restaurants available to consumers. A low-income consumer will have more unhealthy options than healthy options to choose where they will buy their meals. However, this isn't the deciding factor for these consumers, price is. I found that the price of healthy produce is expensive in low-income neighborhoods while high-caloric foods are inexpensive. I also discovered that the amount a customer spends at a healthy restaurant is more than what they would spend at an unhealthy fast-food restaurant. This would make "junk food" more affordable than healthy foods which would influence consumers' decision of where and what foods to purchase. The overeating of the unhealthy foods will increase health issues (e.g. obesity) among these low-income consumers. I believe that these unfortunate issues are deeply rooted in society. The economic and marketing system causes an already underprivileged group (due to their low-income) to face more disadvantages. Now, when I view an obese low-income consumer I'll think of the harsh reality of what caused their issue. It hurts to think about how some of these consumers lack knowledge of the primary cause of the struggles they face. The lack of knowledge may cause them to blame themselves which can lead to mental illnesses such as depression, distorted self-image and low

self-esteem. This now broadens the range of health illnesses that low-income consumers are susceptible to.