What is the nature of the race and health gradient?

- Numerous studies show that African Americans tend to have worse health, measured in a number of ways, than Whites.
- Jaynes and Williams report that while life expectancy at birth has increased for all races across this century, blacks tend to have a lower life expectancy than whites. However,
  - The life expectancy at birth for black women is somewhat higher than that for white men.

What factors tend to account for racial differences in excess mortality?

- What is excess mortality among blacks compared to whites?
  - The portion of the mortality rate for blacks that is over the age-adjusted white rate.
- What are the causes?
  - Accidents and homicides (35.1%)
  - Infant mortality (26.9%)
  - Heart disease and stroke (14.4%)
  - Cirrhosis (4.9%)
  - Cancer (3.8%)
  - Diabetes (1.0%)

Health issues in early life

- Overall, the infant mortality rate for the U.S tends to be higher than that for many countries.
- However, the rate for African Americans is much higher than that for the U.S. as a whole and for other countries.
- Infant mortality has declined over the past century for both whites and blacks, but some disparity still exists.
- What was responsible for much of the decline in infant mortality during and after the mid-1960’s?
  - Advent of medical technology designed to keep low birthweight babies alive. Indeed, low birthweight babies born in the U.S. have the highest rates of survival for any country.

Health issues in early life

(continued)

- Much of the gap in infant mortality between blacks and whites occurs due to low birthweight babies.
- Can low birthweight be seen as a public health problem?
- What are the mechanisms producing low birthweight that could be treated in a public health manner?
• Poverty
• Low education
• Unmarried
• Lack of prenatal care
• Use of tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs

Health issues in early life
(continued)
• Once we adjust for all of the low birthweight risk factors, what happens to the relationship between race and that outcome?
  • One study by Lieberman and colleagues found that the effects of race on low birthweight disappeared once these other factors were taken into consideration.
  • One factor that is commonly thought to produce low birthweight is teen pregnancy. However, Jaynes and Williams note that if all teenage births had been prevented in 1983, the rate of low birthweight would have decreased only 3% for blacks (and 8% for whites).

Health issues among children
• Despite gains in mortality over the past century, largely due to the elimination of many infectious diseases, the gap in mortality between black and white children remains large.
• Given the reduction in deaths due to infectious diseases, what are the current most common causes of death?
  • Injury

Health issues among children
(continued)
• The following are data from the NCHS 1992 mortality report.

Health issues among children
(continued)
• How do the types of injuries differ by race?
  • For white children, automobile accidents are the leading source of injury-related deaths.

Health issues among children
(continued)
• For black children, automobile accidents contribute to death rates, but other types of accidents do as well. Many of these injuries are due to circumstances associated with SES, such as:
  • living in areas with high traffic patterns
• living in areas with streets or buildings needing repair
• uncollected trash and debris
• stairwells needing repair
• lack of screens or window guards
• lack of smoke detectors

Health issues among children
(continued)
• Jaynes and Williams argue that several types of problems that can occur in childhood can lead to problems of development. These include,
  • malnutrition
  • anemia (iron deficiency)
  • lead poisoning
  • lack of immunization
  • lack of dental care
  • child neglect and abuse

Discussion Question
• Could the problems associated with race differences in mortality during childhood be treated using public health interventions? Further,
• How effective would these strategies be without changing the SES circumstances of the child?

Health issues among adults
• Major factors that contribute to black-white mortality differentials in adulthood include
  • homicide
  • AIDS
  • hypertension
  • cancer

Health issues among older adults
• Among older adults, both black and white, the most important cause of death is cardiovascular disease. What gains in life expectancy would be realized for persons over 65 if CVD was eliminated (data from 1978)?
  • overall: 14.3 years
  • white men: 10.1 years
  • black men: 11.2 years
  • white women: 17.4 years
  • black women: 22.1 years
Health issues among older adults

- What is the mortality crossover effect?
  - After age 80, black men and women can expect to outlive similarly situated whites.
- What are the possible reasons for this crossover?
  - Hardiness hypothesis
  - Data problems
  - Support issues(?)

Discussion Question

- Much of the race-health gradient can be explained by factors relating to SES. What other factors might account for the association?
  - racial segregation
  - discrimination
  - access to health care, including perceptions towards health care
  - toxic environments