SOC 205 Lecture 18
Race and Health Issues: Hispanics

Who is Hispanic?
• According to Sanjur, Hispanic Americans can be of any race but who share a Spanish-language heritage and trace their roots to the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Mexico.

Census Self-identification
• In the 1980 census, self-identified Hispanics reported their race in the following ways:
  • White: 55.6%
  • Black: 2.7%
  • American Indian: .6%
  • Asian/Pacific Islander: 1.1%
  • Other: 40%
• The 1990 census form includes the term “Spanish” in order to guarantee the most complete information.

Numbers of Hispanics
• While the U.S. population as a whole increased about 9.8% from 1980 to 1990 (226.5 million to 248.7 million), the Hispanic population increased by 53%, from 14.6 million to 22.4 million.
  • Much of this increase was due to immigration
  • Demographic trends indicate that the Hispanic population will grow more rapidly than the population as a whole. The growth will be fueled by:
    • Young age structure
    • High fertility
    • Immigration

Numbers of Hispanics
(continued)
• It is estimated that by the year 2000, the number of Hispanics in the U.S. will have grown to about 29 million
• The growth of the Hispanic population will not be spread evenly:
  • Numbers of Cubans likely to decline
  • Numbers of Central Americans likely to increase

Geographic Distribution
• A majority of Hispanics live in two states:
  • California
  • Texas
About 87% of Hispanics live in the 10 states shown in Figure 1.4.

Geographic Distribution
(continued)

Different groups of Hispanics tend to be located in different areas of the country:
- Mexican Americans - southwest, especially California and Texas
- Puerto Ricans - New York metropolitan area
- Cubans - Florida, especially Dade County
- Central and South Americans - majority in California but sizable communities in large eastern urban areas
- “Other Hispanics” - New Mexico and Arizona; about 80% of these were born in the U.S.

Socioeconomic Distribution

Not only is there great variability in the geographical distribution of Hispanics in the U.S., but there is also great variability in SES between groups.
- Cubans tend to have the highest level of SES among Hispanic groups.

Migrant Farm Workers

A migrant farm worker is one:
“whose primary employment is in agriculture on a seasonal or other temporary basis, and whose permanent residence is out of the country or state where he is working” (Sanjur 1995).
- In 1970, the U.S. Senate subcommittee on Migratory Labor said of migrant farm workers,
“No other segment of our population is so poorly paid, yet contributes so much to our nation’s wealth and welfare. Despite their vital role in modern agriculture, particularly in filling the crucial need at harvest time, these people have been grossly neglected by our society…”

Migrant Farm Workers
(continued)

Although not all migrant farm workers are of Hispanic origin, many of them are.
Migrant workers tend to follow three central streams of migration:
- West coast and Midwest migrant workers tend to be of Mexican heritage
- The East coast stream tends to be more ethnically varied and includes Blacks living in rural Florida as well as Puerto Ricans, Haitians, Mexicans, and Southeast Asians

Problems faced by
Migrant Farm Workers
• Health problems - it is estimated that migrant workers have an average life expectancy of 50 years at birth. Some of the reasons include:
  • Pesticide exposure
  • Agricultural accidents
  • Working conditions
  • Living conditions

Problems (continued)

• Extreme poverty
  • One study found that the average family income for a migrant farm-working family was $7,330 in 1988. An average of 5.2 persons were dependent on this level of income.
• Lack of educational opportunities
  • Constant movement makes schooling difficult
• Lack of political power
• Lack of access to health care
• Lack of social integration
• Others?

Discussion Question
• Given the very nature of migratory farm work, can the problems faced by migrant farm workers be overcome?
• Being a migrant farm worker is associated with a host of problems. If you were to think about another group of people (that may not exist) that encountered similar problems but lived in a stable environment, would you expect them to have better or worse health outcomes?
• What factors contribute to one becoming a migrant farm worker? How does that contribute to your understanding of the problems faced by migrant farm workers?

Health Issues
• Sanjur defines excess mortality as
  “the difference between the number of deaths that occurred among minority groups and the number expected from age- and gender-specific death rates of the non-Hispanic white population.” (1995:202)
• Although the mean SES level of Hispanics tends to be lower than that for whites, Hispanics tend to have better mortality outcomes in several ways.
  • CVD
  • Cancer
  • Infant mortality
Health Issues
(continued)
• Why do we see this pattern of excess mortality among Hispanics?
  • Diet (increased risk of stomach cancer due to use of certain spices
  • Health behaviors (less heavy smoking)
  • “Unspecified” genetic factors
  • Environment
  • Data problems

Health Issues
(continued)
• Hayes-Bautista provides two other rationales for the better than expected health results among Hispanics:
  • Healthy families
  • Healthy work ethic

Health Care
• Access to health care cannot be driving the observed health patterns for Hispanics

Barriers to health care
• Lack of health insurance
  • In 1989, 39% of Hispanics lacked health insurance compared to 14% of whites and 24% of African Americans
  • The rate of uninsured Hispanics increased over the decade from 1979 to 1989 by about 151%, compared to 13% for whites and 26% for African Americans
  • Coverage rates are worst for Central and South Americans and Mexicans

Barriers
(continued)
• Inconvenience in obtaining care
  • Long waiting times
  • Long wait for appointments
  • Loss of pay from work
  • Care unavailable when needed
  • Inconvenient hours of service
  • Language and cultural differences
    • Lack of Hispanic health professionals