Societal Affluence and Health

- There is a correspondence between measures of societal affluence and health. Generally speaking, countries with higher levels of GDP per capita have better levels of health overall. (*)
- However, there are some major exceptions to this rule:
  - The U.S. has the highest per capita GDP in the world yet in 1992 ranked 18th in terms of infant mortality.
  - Life expectancy in the U.S. in 1992 was similar to that for Costa Rica and Cuba, yet GDP per capita was $5,480 and $3,412 in those countries compared to $23,760 in the U.S.
- One possible explanation of this pattern is wealth and income distribution. (?)
- As in the U.S., levels of SES within countries are strongly related to health. (*)

The Human Development Index

- Given these problems with using GDP per capita as an indicator of societal well-being, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) developed the Human Development Index (HDI).
- The HDI is a measure that, “ranks 173 countries by a measure that combines life expectancy, educational attainment and basic purchasing power.”
- By using the HDI, researchers can also examine the state of affairs for specific subpopulations or regions within a country. (**) 

SES in Developing Countries

- In developing countries, the measure of SES that researchers most commonly focus on is maternal education. (?)
- As such, many of the programs geared to increase health and well-being in developing countries are oriented to improving the overall education levels of women in the society.

Causes of Health Problems in Developing Countries

- There are a number of factors that lead to health problems in developing countries.
  - The UN has estimated that since 1987, over 2 million children have been killed due directly or indirectly to war.
    - Another 6 million have been seriously injured or disabled due to war.
    - One alarming trend is the number of children used as combatants in warfare. It is estimated that about 300,000 children under the age of 18 currently serve in that regard.
• Another factor related to health outcomes in developing (and developed countries) is malnutrition. It is estimated that about 200 million children receive inadequate nutrition. Of these, about 10 million suffer from severe malnutrition. (*)
• Two possible effects of malnutrition on growth are:
  • wasting: weight is less than expected for height
  • stunting: retardation in linear growth as measured by total body length or height.

Leading Causes of Death and Disability Worldwide

• Currently, the causes of death that lead to the most years of life lost are infectious diseases.
• However, it is projected that this scenario will change over the next 20 years.
• It is estimated that by 2020, the leading cause of years of life lost will be heart disease. (*)
• When taking into account years spent with disability, heart disease will still be the leading cause, but it will be followed by depression. (*)

The New Epidemic

• One disease that is poised to wipe out huge numbers of people in developing countries is HIV/AIDS. (*)
• Given the state of education and income in these regions, what sorts of interventions would prevent the spread of the disease?
• Would those interventions need to be culturally based, or could we intervene in the same manner in all countries?