

Mental Health and Poverty

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Serious mental illness is a disease of poverty in much the same way as cholera or tuberculosis. Anyone can suffer from these illnesses, but people are much more likely to do so if they are poor

- Specifically urban effect evident from the very beginning
- Convincingly demonstrated in Chicago in 1930s
- Strongest effect related to diagnoses of schizophrenia

- Well conducted research in 1950s and 60s suggested social drift accounted for urban effect
- Modern studies show effect of childhood exposure to inner city deprivation
- Also effects of childhood abuse
- Does not necessarily contradict biological findings

*People living in poverty
tend to experience
worse outcomes from
treatment than
wealthier people*

- Higher educational attainment long known to predict better outcomes
- Neglect of services for people with poor treatment outcomes
- Inverse care law
- Patient choice agenda
- Programmatic intervention versus relational therapeutic strategies

A substantial part of clinical practice for most mental health professionals involves effort to help patients to overcome the extensive adverse effects of social deprivation

- Recovery belongs to people not services
- Assaults on benefits
- Assaults on housing
- Assaults on employment conditions
- Free to all civic facilities versus disability entitlements

The most important measure that might plausibly reduce the incidence and prevalence of serious mental illness is action to reduce poverty and income inequality.

- This is true for nearly all health problems
- Wilkinson and Pickett 'The Spirit Level'
- Mental health problems (depression and anxiety)
- Social mobility

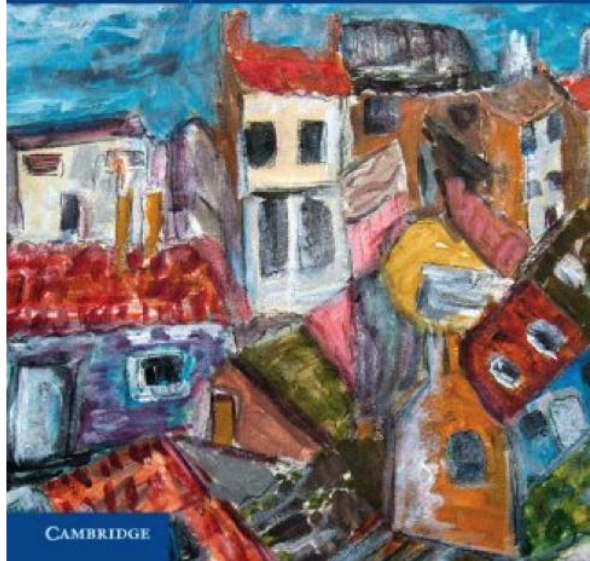
Intervention at an individual level is unlikely to prevent mental illness, but action against poverty would be a powerful public health measure.

- Individual intervention is important. Caring for people matters.
- Individual intervention cannot resolve problems with fundamental social origins, e.g. tuberculosis
- Lifestyle choices are not a social model
- We need a message of hope, not despair



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