

A world health organization



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Why is health a social issue?

Health, in the light of World Health Organization definition, is understood as subjectively felt physical, mental and social well-being as a result of appropriate adaptation to the environmental conditions. Psychological health relates to proper human system functioning. Mental health is connected with ability to recognition of people's feelings and emotions, coping with difficult situations, problems and stress. Social health concerns the human community, its development and adaptability to the environmental conditions, what means ability to live independently as well as in a social group and retain both individual and group identity.

There were many attempts to classify factors conditioning health. During early 20th century up to 1970s, it was considered, that health mainly depends on health service. At the beginning of the 1970s way of perceiving determinants of people's well-being changed. In 1974 Marc Lalonde, Minister of Health for Canada, proposed The Health Field Concept, in which he distinguished four basic factors conditioning health (Fig. 1.):

- Lifestyle (50%)
- Physical and social environment (20%)
- Human Biology (20%)
- Health Care Organization (20%)

This approach influenced on change in health policy and established base for health promotion

In modern societies, some of the main problems regarding the health such as illnesses induced by ageing, globalization, new technologies, and genetic engineering have cultural and social grounds. State of health is strongly

dependent on social processes and occurrences such as lifestyle (for instance nutrition, recreation, reaction for stress), social cohesion, wealth, education, working conditions and emotional relations. All these things can on the one hand make worse or on the other hand improve the state of health.

Currently, it is considered that, the socioeconomic factors (for instance incomes, social status, education level, social support) affect a person's health to the highest degree. Depending on these conditions, the person's lifestyle can favour health or be harmful to it. Poverty and low level of education are reasons of health inequalities. In general, people with low social status are less healthy, have worse access to health care and take risky for health actions more often. Social support in human living environments is regarded as significant factor shaping positive health and fighting pathogenic influence of potential stressors.

In recent decades, people witness a dynamic development of technology and science. As might be expected, new technologies facilitate human lives and make them more efficient. It is possible to say, that in present circumstances, people are able to have an influence on their state of health. However, not always advances of science and in technology go hand in hand with improvement of quality of life. People, preoccupied with making their lives more comfortable, more and more frequently forget about their biological existence. New facilities, means of transport, automation, all kinds of machines are reducing physical activity in their daily life to a minimum. Mass-media, especially television, take them a lot of free time and force them to the sedentary way of life. Nowadays, people suffer from many

ailments defined as civilization diseases, which increase alongside with the (continuously) quickening pace of living.

Undoubtedly, work is also a very important determinant of health. When it is done for pleasure, work can give a sense of happiness and positive energy. In practice, it means that actions based on harmony with the environment and self-realization favour person's health. Work, which is not a vocation, is a reason of stress, unwillingness and apathy.

Meanings of health change in the popular culture and public awareness. Besides strivings for avoiding diseases, more and more people need fitness, vitality, good looks and good mood. Apart from interest in length of life, there appeared care for its sense and quality.

In recent years, there is observed a considerable increase in importance of health in sphere of personal aspirations, aims, and values of individual. Health is no longer defined only as an absence of disease and discomfort. Healthy lifestyle becomes in many environments a phenomenon on the verge of fashion.

Health issues come into prominence in public discourse, concerning inter alia social and political priorities. The right to health is one of the most important elements of the human rights.

Nowadays, health and disease become “valuable goods” of expanding market.