Life Course Perspective: A Context for Practice

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Goal

• To make the Life Course Perspective relevant to clinical or programmatic practice
Objectives

• Upon completion of the session, participants will be able to:
  • To describe Life Course Perspective
  • To identify examples of Life Course in practice
  • To identify challenges to incorporating Life Course into practice
  • To construct needed changes to incorporate Life Course Perspective into practice
Slides and Ideas Adapted from:

• Jeff Brosco
• Amy Fine
• Cheri Pies
• Milton Kotelchuck
• Karen Edwards
• Michael Lu
• Neal Halfon
• Bonnie Spear
• Johns Hopkins School of Public Health
• Life Course is a theory or perspective that seeks to understand, explain, and improve health and disease patterns across population groups. (Amy Fine)

• Life Course suggests that a complex interplay of biological, behavioral, psychological and social protective and risk factors contribute to health outcomes across the span of a person’s life. (Cheri Pies)
Life Course Concepts ‘T2E2’

• **Timeline** – health is cumulative and longitudinal, i.e., developed over a lifetime.

• **Timing** - health and health trajectories are particularly affected during critical/sensitive periods.

• **Environment** – the broader environment (biologic, social, physical, economic) affects health and development.

• **Equity** – health inequality reflects more than genetics and personal choice.

*Fine and Kotelchuck, 2010*
A life course approach recognizes the role of time in shaping health outcomes and incorporates time into models explaining health outcomes.
Time Scales

- Individual time
- Historical time

- Not just about the life of an individual but more about the life of individuals over time (generations)
Risk and Protective Factors

Protective factors improve health and contribute to healthy development.

Risk factors diminish health and make it more difficult to reach one’s full potential.

In addition to individual behavior or access to health, factors can include family, neighborhood, community and social policy.
LC marries long-term MCH concepts with new science

- Barker Hypothesis
- Felitti’s ACE Study
- Neurons to Neighborhoods, NAS
- Lu/Halfon
- Epi-genetics
Critiques and Questions

• Early programming - too deterministic?
  • Too front-loaded? What does LC tell us about later life stages?
• CSHCN?
• Genetic services?

Fine, 2011
But, LC also...

• Greatly expands the opportunities for intervention:
  a much broader set of venues and partners
  over a much longer timeline

• Suggests the need for better linkage (vertical, horizontal, temporal)

• Encourages us to rethink and realign some of the current strategies and add new ones

*Fine, 2011*
• So, we talk about life course as a perspective, framework, theory, but how does it really work in the real world?
Questions to consider

• How have you seen Life Course in action?

• What are the challenges to incorporating Life Course into your practice or program?

• What are some changes (big and small) that need to happen to make this work?
Rethinking MCH: The Life Course Model as an Organizing Framework

Prepared under contract by
Amy Fine and Milton Kotelchuck
October 2010

http://mchb.hrsa.gov/lifecourseresources.htm
Confronting Social Disparities in Child Health: A Critical Approach of Life Course Science and Research

Pediatrics 2009; 124;S203-S211

By: Paul Wise, MD, MPH

DOI: 10.1542/peds2009-1100H

www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/124/Supplement_3/S203
In October 2010, the Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities was awarded a three-year grant from the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) to develop a Maternal and Child Health Life Course Research Network (MCH LCRN). This exciting new project represents a unique opportunity to improve our understanding of how health develops over the life course by providing researchers, practitioners, policymakers and consumers with a transdisciplinary, translational and transformative mechanism for interacting, sharing information and tools, and engaging in collaborative and innovative projects.

http://healthychild.ucla.edu/LCRN.asp
• This site provides a number of key resources in the hopes that MCH Training Programs will partner with MCHB in exploring the implications of life course perspectives to improve the health and well-being of all women, children, youth and families now, and over future generations.

http://mchb.hrsa.gov/lifecourseresources.htm
Top 5 Scientific Articles on Life Course

Examples of Local Initiatives

• Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership -- http://www.sisterlink.com/

• Harlem Children’s Zone -- http://www.hcz.org/programs/the-hcz-project

• Contra Costa (CA) Health Department -- http://www.cchealth.org/groups/lifecourse/ and http://www.cchealth.org/groups/lifecourse/pdf/12_point_plan_fact_sheet.pdf

• Wisconsin Department of Health Services -- http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/healthybirths/pdf/abshealthyfamilies.pdf