Introduction

Social determinants of health are environmental factors that impact people’s health by various means including factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), race, gender, and education. They can impact food accessibility, housing security, employment stability as well as opportunities available to improve one’s health or receive treatment (Islam, 2019). Conditions like fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which can cause deformities and learning disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a developmental condition that impacts one’s social interactions, are heavily correlated with various social determinants of health because of the risk for alcoholism and the difficulty in accessing health services. This literature review will investigate how the rates of diagnosis and treatment are impacted for patients with FAS and ASD by factors such as race and SES. By analyzing the rates of diagnosis and treatment in communities with ASD and FAS, we aim to determine if there are inequities in rates that can be explained by race and SES independently. With this information it may be possible to identify cost-effective strategies that may improve the treatment of these conditions in racial minorities and lower SES communities.

Methods

Previous literature regarding social determinants of health generally focused on the link between poverty and health. Current research, though, focuses more on the relationship between different social determinants such as race and further explores socioeconomic status (SES) in health because of greater evidence supporting that clusters of social determinants may be linked. Additionally, multiple cross-sectional observational studies were used as the primary forms of data analysis that made the correlation between social determinants like SES or race and disability apparent. The studies analyzed in this literature review were compared to similar cross-sectional studies in order to confirm the hypotheses regarding these correlations.

Results

The data reveals that minority children diagnosed with ASD who come from a lower SES have difficulties accessing therapy services and psychiatric medications. This group is also less likely to have a doctor that spends enough time with them. Additionally, parents who are lower income or received a low-level education are less likely to feel that a doctor listens to their concerns. Lastly, African American children with ASD have a smaller chance of experiencing a doctor that spends enough time with them. Additionally, parents who are lower income or received a low-level education are less likely to have a doctor that spends enough time with them. Additionally, parents who are lower income or received a low-level education are less likely to feel that a doctor listens to their concerns. Lastly, African American children with ASD have a smaller chance of experiencing a doctor that spends enough time with them.

Future Directions

The public health system has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated issues such as alcoholism and poverty. Therefore, in an effort to adapt to the new needs of the public, identification of enhanced public health needs is crucial. Following this pandemic there will be a greater need for our social safety net, and efficiency on a per-dollar basis for most benefit will be paramount for a further stretched system. For example, working on improving mental health across our nation can decrease the rates of alcoholism, especially in lower SES areas where a greater number of people have been displaced or left unemployed, and could stand to decrease the rate of FAS. The education system has also been damaged by COVID-19, and promotion of health literacy in the system may allow a deeper understanding regarding ASD in lower income and minority communities.

Conclusions

Social determinants of health like race and SES likely impact rates of diagnosis and treatment for patients with FAS and ASD, but current research is working to analyze the impacts of such factors. It may be helpful to prioritize the importance of education because focusing on this issue can help increase the awareness about the risks of alcoholism and the resulting possibility of FAS, and the characteristics of ASD. Furthermore, the healthcare system must work on creating easier access to treatment for lower income and minority communities. Overall, examining areas affected by social determinants of health and determining what solutions can aid those negatively impacted by them is crucial to supporting our nation’s development and rebound from this pandemic.

References


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