The social determinants of health are defined as "the conditions in places where people live, learn, work, and play." For centuries, social determinants of health have impacted the quality of life and health of human beings.

Socially disadvantaged people are physically, mentally, and socially more vulnerable to infectious disease. This creates health inequality which produces conditions for the transmission of infectious disease thus, contributing to an unequal burden of morbidity and mortality.

As of March 3, 2021 there have been about 114 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 2.5 million deaths worldwide reported to the WHO.

Social determinants of health have been identified in literature specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic to affect incidence and mortality rates.

To identify the recent evidence of specific social determinants of health within the context of the pandemic that are important to consider for prevention of the spread of infectious diseases, specifically COVID-19. This will be vital to long term success reducing health disparities, health inequity, morbidity, and mortality.

Search terms were:
- "COVID-19" or "COVId-19" or "social determinants of health"
- "2019-nCoV" or "health disparities"
- Search terms were:
- "CORONAVIRUS" or "COVID-19" or "social determinants of health"
- "Vaccines" or "vaccination"
- "2019-nCoV" or "health disparities"

Background

For centuries, social determinants of health have played a major role in shaping health outcomes. Social determinants of health are defined as the conditions in places where people live, learn, work, and play. These conditions are shaped by economic, political, and social forces, and they can have a significant impact on health outcomes.

Social determinants of health are complex and interrelated, and they can interact with each other to create a cumulative effect on health. For example, poverty, education, and access to healthcare are all social determinants of health, and they can interact to create a cycle of poor health outcomes.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to evaluate the relationship of social determinants of health with the COVID-19 pandemic. The review aims to identify and analyze the impact of social determinants of health on the incidence of COVID-19 and mortality rates.

Methods

SEARCH STRATEGY:
- PubMed was used to search for empirical research on the relationship of social determinants of health and COVID-19 published since 2019.
- Search terms:
  - "COVID-19" or "CORONAVIRUS"
  - "2019-nCoV" or "social determinants of health"
  - "social determinants of health"
- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
- Full-text articles excluded

Results

Education
- Lower level education (i.e., less than a high school diploma) was prevalent in communities with incredibly high rates of COVID-19.
- Lower level education was also found to be associated with higher COVID-19 death rates.

Employment
- 50% of college students reported that their employment was directly impacted by the pandemic.
- 42% of participants still expressed concern about their employment due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic.
- Incidence rate was positively associated with those who spend >1 hour to reach their place of work and the percentage of employed persons aged >18 in the city.

Income
- Those with very low median household income had financial difficulties purchasing basic needs (e.g., medicine, food).
- Both individual and median household income were significant predictors of COVID-19 incidence.
- Affluent neighborhoods were associated with significantly lower case rates and neighborhood poverty was associated with elevated COVID-19 deaths.

Mental Health Consequences
- 1 in 4 people reported having experienced a strong emotional impact, with rising anxiety and depression levels.
- Around 25% stated that their anxiety would lead to limitations in their daily life.
- Lack of socialization and loss of human connection is likely to lead to depression.

Conclusions

Across all studies it was evident that social determinants of health have had a significant influence on the rates of COVID-19 cases and mortality.
- The literature confirms that all individuals are not equally at risk for COVID-19.
- Consistent patterns noted throughout the current literature included access to healthcare, education, crowded housing, poverty, unemployment, being an essential worker or coming from a diverse racial/ethnic background.
- Social determinants of health need to be a part of pandemic research priorities because there is potential to reduce future pandemic morbidity and mortality.

References