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Ichiro Kawachi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Health and Social Behavior at Harvard School of Public Health where he is also the Director of the Center for Society and Health.

He is author of numerous articles and books chapters with a focus on social epidemiology.

He received the 1996 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Investigator Award in Health Policy Research to study the effects of income inequality and social capital on population health.

He is a core member of the MacArthur Foundation Network and has been a guest expert with Worldbank.

RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital refers to those features of social relationships - such as levels of interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity and mutual aid - that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit. Social capital is believed to play an important role in the functioning of community life across a variety of domains, ranging from the prevention of juvenile delinquency and crime, business development, the promotion of successful youth development, to the encouragement of political participation. More recently, researchers have begun to apply the concept to explain variations in health status across geographic localities.

Professor Kawachi's pioneering work identified that the higher the stocks of social capital the higher appear to be the health achievement of a given area. He argues that strengthening the social capital within communities may provide an important avenue for reducing socioeconomic disparities in health.

His work reveals that life expectancy, illness, and other health factors are closely related to the structure of a given society, and that variations of health within a population are primarily related to socio-structural factors, including income inequality, educational differences, lack of opportunities, and racism. For example, societies with great income and social inequality, such as the United States and Great Britain, have far higher tolls of certain illnesses and far lower life-expectancy rates across all social classes than do more equitable societies, whether rich or poor. He argues that the increasing gap

between the rich and the poor in the United States has had dramatic health consequences for the entire American population, and that, given these findings, even a modest reduction in income inequality would yield a significant health improvement for all.

OTHER RESEARCH INTERESTS

Social Determinants of Health

This research seeks to link macro social forces -- such as income distribution, social cohesion and social capital, inequalities in political participation, and residential segregation -- to patterns of health and disease in populations. Studies in progress feature both ecologic and multi-level designs, with a variety of health outcomes (mortality, morbidity, quality of life).

Psychosocial Risk Factors for Heart Disease

This research attempts to link psychosocial factors to risk of heart disease. These risk factors include: work environment (job stress, shift work); personality and negative emotions (anger, hostility, anxiety, and depression); as well as the protective effects of social networks and support. These studies are being carried out in four cohort studies: the Nurses' Health Study and Nurses' Health Study II in women; the Health Professionals Follow-up Study and VA Normative Aging Study in men.

Health-related Quality of Life

Studies in progress include prospective investigations of healthy aging in a large cohort of woman; predictors of functional recovery following major illness, such as breast cancer and heart attack; and the role of work organization in predicting functional outcomes among working women.

Smoking and Health

Studies include the effects of passive smoking on disease risk; the health effects of smoking so-called "low yield" cigarettes; and the impact of excise taxes on cigarette consumption.