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SOCIAL FACTORS IN MENTAL DISORDERS - UPDATE ON THE EVIDENCE

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Context: Social determinants of mental health and mental illness are classic topics of social psychiatric research and practice.

Objectives: The broad range as well as specific examples of different areas of this field of interest will be presented and discussed with a focus on current research needs.

Key messages: The field of social determinants of mental health and illness ranges from traditional sociological concepts such as social class and gender to recently emerging concepts such as empowerment, social capital and Amartya Sen's capabilities approach.

There is ample evidence that contextual factors on the micro level, such as the role of the family, as well as those on a macro-level such as stigma and discrimination play a vital role with regard to psychiatric disorders, their treatment and course. Also, internationally emerging policies and research into mental health promotion and prevention clearly show that interventions rely on and vary with social structures and policy strategies in different cultural and economical situations. Current special interest fields in psychiatry such as migration, urbanicity and childhood experiences renew interest into gene x environment interactions as do the dynamic and complex concepts of recovery and resilience.

Conclusions: The large existing evidence base as well as urgent current research efforts such as those into epigenetic mechanisms warrant new vigor in developing and researching variables for further research into the social determinants of mental health and illness.