

## **Social conditions, health equity, and human rights**

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“.....The fields of health equity and human rights have different languages, perspectives, and tools for action, yet they share several foundational concepts.

This paper explores connections between human rights and health equity, focusing particularly on the implications of current knowledge of how social conditions may influence health and health inequalities, the metric by which health equity is assessed.

The role of social conditions in health is explicitly addressed by both

- 1) the concept that health equity requires equity in social conditions, as well as in other modifiable determinants, of health; and
- 2) the right to a standard of living adequate for health.

The indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights — civil and political as well as economic and social — together with the right to education, implicitly but unambiguously support the need to address the social (including political) determinants of health, thus contributing to the conceptual basis for health equity. The right to the highest attainable standard of health strengthens the concept and guides the measurement of health equity by implying that the reference group for equity comparisons should be one that has optimal conditions for health.

The human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality also strengthen the conceptual foundation for health equity by identifying groups among whom inequalities in health status and health determinants (including social conditions) reflect a lack of health equity; and by construing discrimination to include not only intentional bias, but also actions with unintentionally discriminatory effects.

In turn, health equity can make substantial contributions to human rights

- 1) insofar as research on health inequalities provides increasing understanding and empiric evidence of the importance of social conditions as determinants of health; and, more concretely,
- 2) by indicating how to operationalize the concept of the right to health for the purposes of measurement and accountability, which have been elusive.

Human rights laws and principles and health equity concepts and technical approaches can be powerful tools for mutual strengthening, not only by contributing toward building awareness and consensus around shared values, but also by guiding analysis and strengthening measurement of both human rights and health equity....”

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