

## Health Economics

Dr. Pratap C. Mohanty

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee

Week – 12

Lecture 58- Introduction to Public Health

Welcome, friends, to our NPTEL MOOC module on Health Economics. We are on the verge of the last week of the module, and the last week contains public health, its issues, challenges, and how to deal with it. Hence, the first lecture of this week is to explain or introduce you to public health. Hence, it is titled as an introduction to public health. To understand this we are supposed to deal with the following important aspects like how to define public health, then what are different health promotions and what are the different prevention techniques, why prevention is required, then rehabilitation etc. To define we need to refer the standard institutional framework of it that is WHO.

So, the WHO report we are referring to in its 2000 report as a health system is defined as all the activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore, or maintain health. The primary responsibility of any health system is to protect and improve population health, whereas public health is defined as the science and art of avoiding illness, extending life, and improving the efficiency and well-being of the people via coordinated community involvement and their actions. This cares for the entire population and their health and undermines or curtails the extent of diseases that affect their health. This majorly includes health promotion, prevention and rehabilitation.

Hence, we will discuss some of them, starting with health promotion. We need to make some systematic efforts that could guide the upliftment of individual health. Hence it is a guiding concept that involves the set of activities intended to enhance individual and community well-being. This seeks to increase involvement and control of the individual and the community in their own health. This also acts to follow that adversely affects health, well-being, and productive capacities.

To improve health, I mean those acts such as improving health and social welfare and reducing specific determinants of disease and risk factors. Setting targets based on the size of the problem and the feasibility of successful intervention in a very cost-effective way are very important. This is applicable in community clinics, hospitals, and all other service settings. This helps in raising awareness, informing people about their health and lifestyle factors. There are various elements that actually help in promoting health or addressing the

population as a whole in health issues, directing actions to risk factors or causes of illness or death, advocating relevant environmental health and social policy, and encouraging health professional participation in health education and health policy.

This also involves public participation in defining problems and deciding their action plan of action. The next aspect of public health as an introduction is prevention. How can we be able to prevent the odds? It refers to the goals of medicine, which are to promote, preserve, and restore health when it is impaired or to minimize suffering or distress, if any. There are three levels or types of prevention as mentioned by Fos and Fine 2000 paper. They mentioned three levels: primary-level intervention, secondary-level, and tertiary prevention.

Primary prevention largely refers to the activities that are undertaken to prevent disease and injury from occurring. It works with both the individual and the community. It may be directed at the host to increase resistance to the agent, such as immunizations or cessation of smoking. It may be directed at environmental activities to reduce conditions favorable to the vector, such as, like you know, examples like mosquito vectors for malaria or malaria. The use of automobile seat belts, protection or as condoms etcetera, use skin protection from ultraviolet light, tobacco use cessation programs etcetera are called the very primary prevention techniques.

Others are secondary and tertiary. Here, secondary means the early diagnosis, and secondary refers to the diagnosis and its proper management to prevent complications from a disease. It includes steps to isolate cases and treat or immunize contacts to prevent further epidemic outbreaks. At the same time, tertiary prevention refers to the involvement of activities. These are directed at the host but also at the environment to promote rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of maximum function after the disease and its complications are stabilized.

Now, you can differentiate when you are saying primary. It is at the very fundamental level we are actually preventing. Even at the secondary level, we also suggest ways to prevent the diagnosis. Therefore, the management is very important at the secondary level. However, in the tertiary case, we actually prevent it once the disease is contracted. So, providing a wheelchair, special toilet facilities, doors, ramps, and transportation services for paraplegics are often the most vital factors of rehabilitation, etcetera.

Hence, rehabilitation is important in rehabilitating another public health challenge and moving in a different direction. The process of restoring a person's social identity by repositioning his or her normal roles and functions in society is called rehabilitation. It involves the restoration and maintenance of patients' physical, psychological, social, emotional, and vocational abilities. Interventions are directed toward the consequences of

disease and injury. It should include conducting a full assessment of people with disability and suitable support systems.

Similarly, it also includes establishing a clear care plan and providing measures and services to deliver the care plan, which is equally important. So, under this, there are core activities as well like preventing epidemics, protecting the environment, workplace, food, and water, promoting healthy behavior, mentioning the health status of the population, mobilizing community action, responding to disasters, assuring the quality, accessibility, accountability of the medical care and reaching to develop new insights and innovative solutions and also leading the development of sound health planning and policy. Nonetheless, public health requires ethical issues and challenges. Ethical means how the steps are taken directly or indirectly to curtail the behavior of other entities or stakeholders. So, the ethical aspect is actually making the program sustainable.

The ethical checks and the challenges in the ethical checks, if it is checked very clearly, would actually make the program very successful and sustainable. There are economic impacts of the ethical challenges, such as public health regulations affecting industries such as tobacco. If public health aspects are ethically followed very strictly, then the tobacco industry might suffer. Those paying for the public health benefits may not necessarily be the beneficiaries of regulatory actions for workers, safety, and rising costs to consumers. People may not be willing to pay the cost for benefits that would accrue in the long future.

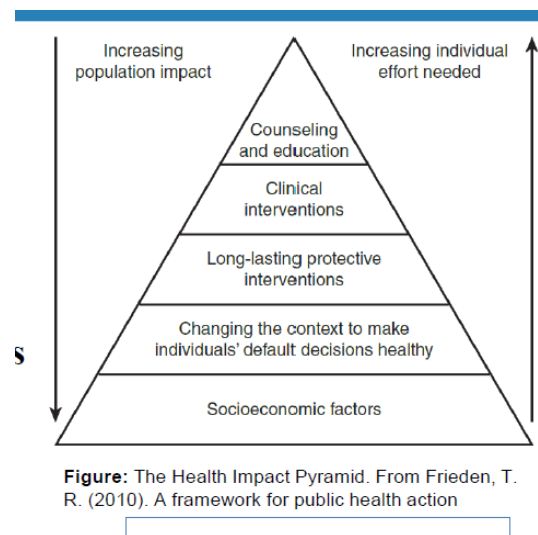
For example, measures to limit global warming etc. Public health measures and religious or moral aspects, such as some public health measures, are not acceptable on religious and moral grounds as well. So, those aspects should also be taken care of while taking some action, like some of the programs, if you remember, in the 80s about strict family planning programs for the families, and there are some mandatory norms followed, and that affects some of the religious sentiments. So, it should also be taken care of. Similarly, sex education, distribution of contraceptives or condoms to adults and morals, adolescents, etc, affect morality as well, and some sort of education and ethical education related to these may also be taken care of.

There are some dilemmas in cost-benefit analysis, like the difficulty of valuing life and the values assigned to the rich versus the poor. You can also refer to the context of equality and equity or inequity, which we discussed. And also we discussed about cost benefit analysis and their challenges in our previous weeks. Promoting public welfare versus individual liberty. That is again in dilemma and in conflicting.

The extent to which the government should restrict individual freedom to improve community health is also equally important. Similarly, collective scope and individualism are where individualistic societies resist the notion of public health concerns for collective action. Hence, in the public health structure and its functions, we have to look at the health

pyramid. What has to be focused on, and what are the different layers? As we are referring to the work of Frieden (2010), you can just see it is in the pyramid at the bottom of socioeconomic factors that need to be checked very carefully.

So, I mean, if we go from the bottom to the top, we are actually emphasizing the individual best efforts. So, increasing individual efforts which are needed for a better public health system. And if you are going in the reverse order, it is actually increasing population impact. From the individual perspective, we track through socioeconomic factors, then change the context to make individuals default decisions as healthy, long-lasting protective interventions, then clinical interventions, then finally, counseling, education, etc., as mentioned by Frieden in the 5-tier pyramid.



This describes the impact of different types of public health interventions, and this provides a framework to improve health. The base of this pyramid indicates interventions with the greatest impact and whether they are supposed to address the socioeconomic determinants of health. This also has long-lasting public health directions that cater to most people. At the base of the pyramid, this indicates they already mentioned the socioeconomic determinants. I have already mentioned the ascending order, and I have also discussed the descending order.

So, these are the basic details and the foundations of public health issues and challenges. So, in the next lecture, we will discuss healthcare provisioning and health system responsiveness and its aspect of demand and supply a little more. So, further readings are there here for you that I think will be highly useful. So, that is all. I look forward to your participation. Thank you.