

Ethnicity, Race, and Health in Multicultural Societies: Foundations for Better Epidemiology, Public Health, and Health Care

Raj S. Bhopal; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0-19-856817-9

Professor Bhopal presents us with a thought-provoking, analytic and comprehensive treatise on the concepts of culture in society in general and, subsequently, how we look at health and disease. A classic introduction sets the stage for the premise upon which the book is based and quotes Australian geneticist, Dr. Steven Jones:

The genetic differences between the snail population of 2 Pyrenean valleys are much greater than those between Australian Aborigines and ourselves. If you were a snail, it would make good biological sense to be a racist: but you have to accept that humans are tediously uniform animals.

This quote helps to establish the complexity of the concepts of race and ethnicity in western society in general, but as it relates to health promotion and disease prevention. The volume is meticulously organized into individual chapters preceded by a bulleted list of chapter contents, objectives, a detailed introduction, exercises and references at the end of the book. The author's professorial roots and public health perspective are evident in the structure, detail and research.

The logical approach to an

area considered controversial for decades truly educates the readers. The focused questions throughout guide the reader's thinking before reviewing the data. Bhopal introduces race and ethnicity in healthcare and in data collection always from the scholarly perspective. The historical analysis of the development of health and healthcare for minorities establishes a foundation for the readers to understand factors that have influenced healthcare in western society. This historical theme is eloquently introduced by a 2000 quote by Krieger:

It is these twin and entangled legacies indelibly inscribed in our nation's history—of conquest, slavery, colonization and immigration on the one hand, and a commitment to liberty and equality on the other—that permeates our changing beliefs and understandings and constructions of the very notion of "race/ethnicity".

Bhopal marches this theme throughout the book while acknowledging the biological limitations of using race/ethnicity as metrics, yet providing data explaining resulting ethnic inequalities. The value of this text is even more evident in that historical evidence and current inequalities are not merely recounted, but rather used to explain why there must be principles for setting priorities for ethnic minority populations and the epidemiological principles to assist this process.

Specific examples of how to think strategically when exploring healthcare dilemmas among race/ethnic minority populations are discussed—along with the consistent

discussion questions interspersed throughout each chapter. These are used as a foundation to inform policy decisions. The author takes this theme throughout the text to discuss how these concepts inform fundamental research among racial/ethnic minorities. These are discussed and reviewed within the framework of the ethics of caring for others—i.e., embracing justice, fairness and equality.

Bhopal has created an important foundational resource for those teaching, practicing and/or performing research in a racially/ethnically diverse environment. This book provides value to students of public health and cultural diversity, as well as to researchers. Its contents are valuable to clinicians as well but probably provide a scholarly approach deemed too rigorous for the daily clinical environment. For those teaching or engaging in scholarly activity in the community, this book is an invaluable resource. I highly recommend it!

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