

Social and Health Inequality in Nigeria: A Survey of Ajegunle Slum Dwellers of Lagos State

Abstract

Social disadvantage and inequalities in health outcomes are critically and significantly related in many ways. The study uses Ajegunle Area of Lagos in Lagos State, Nigeria as the study area. The concept of slums and social and health inequality has been explored greatly, itemizing the key factors that affect health and the impact on the environment, health, and the economy. The study further revealed the level of inequality to access Health facilities and service delivery suffered by Slum dwellers and also exposed the high level of decay of Social Amenities in Slum Settlements occasioned by age-long neglect by the government. The study's findings will serve as valuable material for future research on slum settlements and their impact on health outcomes, potentially prompting government intervention. This intervention could include building better road networks, affordable housing, functional health centers, and providing essential services like electricity, waste disposal, clean water, and employment opportunities. The study also advocates for eliminating socio-economic and health inequalities in Nigeria through greater government commitment to improving the lives of people in all regions of the country.

Key points: Social, Health, Inequality, Slum, Settlement

Introduction

Human life and its existence are usually not very meaningful without good health conditions because both growth and development in every environment have a significant relationship with the prevalent health status of the people [1]. However, according to WHO, (1948) health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being of people living in a place and not necessarily the absence of disease or sickness [2]. It is quite alarming that certain factors in the world today have hindered many individuals from benefiting from topmost health facilities [3] and these factors include; social, economic, genetic, environmental, cultural, and racial. Social and economic disparities, such as poverty and lack of insurance, limit access to quality care, while genetic predispositions can lead to higher health risks that are often poorly addressed in marginalized communities [4]. Environmental factors, such as living in polluted or underserved areas, exacerbate health issues, while cultural beliefs or language barriers may discourage seeking medical care and even racial discrimination in healthcare can result in unequal treatment and access, leaving many unable to benefit from the best available health services [5, 6]. However, this survey focused on the environmental factor (polluted areas).

Because the results of the relationship between environment and health are becoming a source of concern to public health experts because “a healthy environment translates to a healthy people. In medical sociology by Jike, [7], the differences that exist in the environment creates differences in Social life, this to him is Social Inequality. In the same vain according to www.parliament.uk. [8, 9], the inequality in environments equally

creates inequality in health status of a people as poor environments like Slum settlements suffer from gross inadequacy in the provision of health facilities.

It further stated that the Sanitary Conditions and the living conditions of the Laboring Population of Great Britain were scary as their health condition fell far below expectations [10]. If the interest of the government in slum settlements improves, the writer was so sure that disease could be wiped out completely and life expectancy improved if the social conditions were changed. However, the relationship between social disadvantage which is the poor living conditions of the people, and health outcome which is disease has led to the introduction of the Public Health Act of 1848 and the beginning of the modern public health movement following Chadwick's 1848 report on Environmental influence on health. Communities where the mortality rate is over 23 per 1,000 were expected to form local Boards of Health in charge of cleansing, proper water supplies sewerage, drainage, and the regulation of slaughterhouses by Public Health Act 1848.

Thus, the circumstances people live in like their jobs, living conditions, education, and community profoundly impact their health and well-being [11]. When someone loses a job, for example, the stress of financial insecurity can make it harder to stay healthy, as they struggle to afford medical care, nutritious food, and safe housing [11]. Those living in overcrowded or unsafe environments face daily health risks, from illness to injury. At the same time, people who haven't had access to education may find it difficult to navigate healthcare systems or understand medical advice [12]. As people age, their risk of chronic illness increases, and without a strong support system, many face isolation and neglect [13]. Gender and inequality also play a role—women may face challenges related to reproductive

health [14]. At the same time, men might engage in riskier behaviors, and both experience the impact of unequal access to resources. People living in poverty, those without homes, or recent immigrants often find it even harder to stay healthy due to poor living conditions and barriers to healthcare [15, 16]. Clean water, proper sanitation, and social connections are basic needs that, when lacking, can lead to severe health issues. Meanwhile, lifestyle choices like diet and exercise also affect long-term health. These issues are rarely isolated they combine and reinforce one another, creating a cycle of poor health that can be hard to escape without targeted support and intervention.

Discussion

Social disadvantage and inequalities in health outcomes are critically and significantly connected in many ways. Socially disadvantaged people are socially alienated people in a Society. These are people who mostly live in serious lack and want. They summarily lack access to quality living. Extreme poverty, disease, and increased mortality are high among socially disadvantaged people particularly Slum Dwellers as can be seen among the Ajegunle People of Lagos State, Nigeria. In stating the obvious, annoying health inequality is a glaring characteristic of socially disadvantaged people.

Jike [7] asserts that in Medical Sociology, inequity in well-being may be described as the discriminatory differences in health status among various groups within the community. Health inequality arises because of the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Imbalance in Health exists in all countries, whether developed, developing, or underdeveloped, but what matters is their different degree of occurrence. A health

organization's Efficiency and effectiveness depend on how rich a state is. The implication of the above is that the third world is not privileged to have a developed health system. Summarily, therefore, it is not gainsaying to state that the reasons for the imbalance in health range from "economic, social, psychological and environmental factors which interact with personal behaviors and access to care". He further states that health inequality refers to the disparities among people and their link to seeking medical care, management, and treatment. This to a large extent has a great effect on individuals or groups' wellbeing. In most cases settlements of people who are of extreme poverty particularly the Slum Dwellers suffer a whole lot of disadvantages but Health Disadvantage seems much more obvious among Slum Dwellers. Ajegunle Settlement in Lagos State, Nigeria is a perfect example for this study. Ajegunle is located in the center of Lagos, in Lagos State Nigeria. It is founded in the Ajesromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos, the people of Ajegunle speak Yoruba as their major language. It is bounded in the west by Apapa Wharf and Tincan Island which is home to one of Nigeria's major Seaports. More than two-thirds of imported goods come into the country through this Seaport. Ajegunle has a population of about 550,000 this is of both aborigines and settlers.



Fig. 1 A Picture of a slum in Ajegunle Lagos, Nigeria adopted from Pinterest

Impact on the Environment

A slum can be described as an area marked by inferior structures in a material state of despair, a dilapidated and dirty environment with an absence of infrastructure and basic amenities like, electricity, clean water, drainage system, schools, health facilities, and recreational grounds. These areas are described as poor-quality domains as a result of old buildings, inadequate care and abandonment, and unsanitary ways of sewage and solid waste.

According to Anon [17], about 1 billion people live in slums all over the world today. This can be traced to the fact that they lack the financial capability to access quality life, befitting homes and befitting environments. Most times too, those who are poverty-stricken are ejected by force and find themselves on the outskirts of cities to unexpected and unplanned settlements. Also, unsanitary living conditions of those inhabiting slum areas and neglect of buildings, bring about the emergence of a slum. The unsanitary surroundings encourage the procreation of rodents, mosquitoes, flies, cockroaches, and diseases like

cholera, diarrhea diseases, typhoid. Overcrowding can lead to airborne diseases like tuberculosis and other respiratory infections.

Impact on Health

The life expectancy of a socially disadvantaged group like slum dwellers is 47 years, one of the lowest in West Africa says the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control this is due to the poverty and pollution they face with daily [18].

The difficult living conditions in slums, marked by overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare, make it easy for diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, and skin infections to spread [19]. Overcrowded spaces allow airborne illnesses to pass from person to person quickly, while the lack of clean water and proper waste management leads to the outbreak of waterborne diseases. Malnutrition further weakens people's immune systems, leaving them more exposed to infections. Stagnant water and poorly built housing also create an ideal environment for mosquitoes, increasing the risk of diseases like malaria and respiratory issues [20]. All of these factors together result in widespread health problems and persistent malnutrition among slum residents.

From: [Health issues in a Bangalore slum: findings from a household survey using a mobile screening toolkit in Devarajeevanahalli](#)

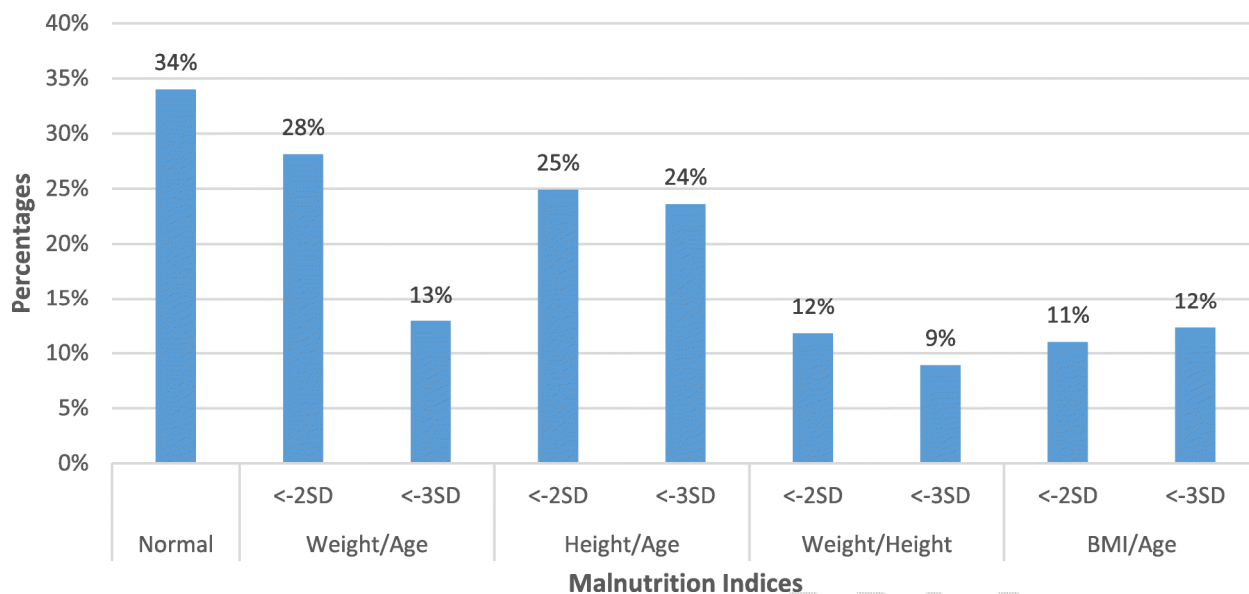


Fig 2 The nutritional status of children in a slum aged less than 5 years. [21]

They are also at risk of non-infectious diseases such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and mental health problems including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and substance abuse as they adopt an urban lifestyle while lacking knowledge and information regarding health and health care.

Impact on Economy

Many people living in the slums are usually very poor unemployed and illiterate. They lack the basic things of life like good housing, adequate disposal of wastes and refuse, good food, clean water, and lighting, they are unsafe and insecure. Low-income earners were shown to be linked with high disease incidence and poor health outcomes [22].

Impact on Education

This Socially disadvantaged group will surely have unequal education opportunities with others who live in urban environments. Poorer living conditions make them socially disadvantaged such that they are not able to afford good schools and quality education.

Ethical and Political Issues

Ethical issues include questions about the equitable distribution of resources, protection of vulnerable groups, respect for patient choice of treatment line, and secrecy.

Ethical principles and ethical issues in public health

Public health ethics is consistent with the prevention orientation of public health. Ethical matters can be predicted early and tackled through careful analysis and consultation. Slum dwellers are faced with a lot of ethical and political issues too numerous to mention. Some of these are listed below. Substandard health conditions, slum dwellers lack health facilities and infrastructure of health due to government neglect and even when the health facilities are nearby they lack adequate funds to access health care because health care is expensive.

They lack good and basic infrastructure and are unable to have access to facilities in the urban areas like shopping malls, markets etc. They breed wayward children who are exposed to drugs early in life due to the environment they find themselves. Most times, these children end up being abused and are subjected to child labor, child trafficking and even forced into early marriages. Some parents who live in slums are forced to sell their children for money because they have so many that they cannot cater to; this can lead to dysfunctional homes where parents are separated from each other and conflict abounds.

Socially disadvantaged individuals are those who are faced with racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias. If the government and well-meaning individuals can come to their aid, by relocating them to better living conditions and providing job opportunities, their lives can be better. Slum upgrading must be considered a priority for the government to avoid the number of slum dwellers from getting to 2 billion by 2030 as projected [23].

Implication of the Study

The implication of this study is basically to reveal the level of inequality to access Health facilities and service delivery suffered by Slum dwellers and principally to expose the high level of decay of Social Amenities in Slum Settlements occasioned by age-long neglect by the government. It is therefore an obvious fact that the overall outcome of this study will drastically help to ameliorate if not eradicate this developmental imbalance and grave inequality in Health and in several other areas of service delivery by enhanced government presence. It is equally necessary to state that the outcome of the study will be a ready-relevant material for further research on Slum Settlements. Generally, if the needful is done by the Government as proffered by the outcome of this study, the life style and the general living condition of Slum Dwellers will tremendously improve. The study will also expose the numerous problems of people living in slums and the level of government neglect of such areas thereby attracting government intervention which could be in several areas such as the construction of good road networks, provision of cheap and affordable houses, provision of functional health facilities, building of primary Health Centers first, before secondary and tertiary health facilities which would help improve the quality of life of the people, Provision

Electricity, Functional Waste Disposal Facilities, access to clean and treated Water, Provision of Employment opportunities.

Suggestion of evidence-based interventions for reducing social inequality, and health inequalities

To improve the health of slum dwellers, the government needs to focus on multiple interventions to take care of their challenges like provision of pharmaceutical companies, ambulance service, and ensuring routine immunization exercises to avoid vaccine-preventable diseases like measles, hepatitis, tetanus, etc.

The government should come up with intervention packages and policies that address the provision of health services. To improve environmental sanitation laws should be enforced such as environmental sanitation exercises once or twice monthly, giving health talks, lectures, and seminars on personal/environmental hygiene in town hall meetings; or published in local and national newspapers, or jingles on the radio. It can be translated into several dialects to pass the message. For defaulters of the monthly environmental Sanitation exercise, sanctions can be enforced by the creation of a mobile court.

It is also recommended that all levels of government beginning from the local government to the State government and Federal Government in Nigeria should be involved actively in developing strategies for sustainable development and infrastructure provision and upgrade of slum in order to transform the numerous slums in the country into sustainable communities.

According to Anon [17], the upgrade of slum in Ajegunle should consist of improving security and conditions under which lands and buildings are occupied by making land rights regular, increasing the provision of basic services as already highlighted above which include access to clean water, energy for cooking and lightening, security lightening, minimizing environmental hazard, provision of incentives for community management, improving access to health care and education and enhancement of livelihoods through vocational training and entrepreneurship.

It is the duty of the public health professionals to bring about the greatest good in terms of health benefits and disease prevention for the greatest number of people and they should be guided by this principle therefore the public health officer will ensure improved sanitation for those slum dwellers. Public Health Officers must ensure that those below five years get a dequate vaccination to reduce infant mortality from infectious diseases.

To further reduce social inequality, there is need for Government to create jobs to reduce the high level of unemployment which leads to crime.

Conclusion

This study brought to bear the grave inequality in Health Facilities and access to Health Care suffered by a typical Slum Settlement. The study used Ajegunle Area of Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria as a Case Study. The choice of Ajegunle is central because it is a typical Slum Settlement in Lagos State. To state the obvious, a high level of inequality in Health Care Access and decay of healthcare facilities and other social amenities is visibly obvious in the Ajegunle Area which is occasioned by Government age-long neglect. It is therefore an

obvious fact that the overall outcome of this study will drastically help to ameliorate the imbalance and grave inequality in access to Health care delivery and in several other areas of service delivery by enhanced government presence. The overall result of the study will be relevant material for further research on the living standard of Slum Dwellers and other related areas of such concerns. The evidence-based suggestions in this study if logically and strategically followed by the Government as proffered by the outcome of this study will certainly improve the quality of life among Slum Dwellers. The study has equally without leaving any stone unturned revealed areas of government-required interventions that will help in reducing the imbalance suffered by Slum Dwellers and make life more meaningful to the people. these interventions can start with such areas as the Provision of cheap and affordable Houses, the Provision of functional Health Facilities specifically starting with the building of Primary Health Centers, provision of a good network of roads which would help improve the quality of life of the people, Provision of Electricity, Functional Waste Disposal Facilities, access to clean and treated Water, Provision of credit facilities for small and medium scale business.

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