

Social capital and community development in child health

Zara Hyde-Peters

Doug Simkiss

Abstract

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health curriculum for community child health says trainees should *'be aware of the literature on social capital and community development in relation to child health and well being'*. Both social capital and community development are concepts that are far removed from the core knowledge set of most paediatricians. This short review will attempt to plug this gap in knowledge by defining and discussing both concepts and suggesting why they may be useful in paediatric practice. We briefly review the literature on social capital and community development (or engagement as the terms are used interchangeably) in relation to child health and well-being and offer a practical summary for how this can be applied to practice for those working in community and hospital settings.

Keywords social capital; community engagement; public health; health inequalities

Introduction

To understand why social capital and community development are relevant to paediatrics we need to understand the broad framework of influences on child health and disease. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is an attempt to explain how children grow and develop. It is made up of spheres of influence (Figure 1).

The theory divides the child's environment into five systems: the theory system, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The microsystem is the system closest to the child and includes family, peers, or caregivers. Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional. The mesosystem describes the influence of two microsystems interacting, for example friends interacting with parents, parents interacting with teachers or teachers interacting with friends. The exosystem is the environment which influences the child's development despite the child not being actively involved. An example would be a parental promotion producing a pay rise, but also involving longer hours at work. The macrosystem is the culture surrounding a child. Aspects include the prevailing political and social beliefs of the

culture. The chronosystem addresses changes over time such as major life transitions and events that occur during development. These influence the way a child interacts with the rest of the ecological system; a move to a new city is one example.

A key report that presented evidence based policy recommendations to reduce health inequalities in the United Kingdom is the Marmot Review 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' published in 2010. This developed a framework for thinking about the causes of health inequalities and the importance of early intervention in the life course, or chronosystem (Figure 2). Two of the six policy recommendations in the review relate specifically to childhood as early intervention produces maximum benefit in long-term outcomes. Policy Objectives E and F are key to the theme of this article, particularly 'improving community capital and reducing social isolation across the social gradient'. The policy objectives are shown in Table 1 below.

Many of these concepts will be new to paediatricians and they are bound up in public health, but we belong to a Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and there has always been an important element of primary prevention in paediatric practice. This is put very well by Jeff Goldhagen, an American paediatrician and children's rights campaigner.

'The history of advances in child health is a chronicle of the application of the principles of social justice, equity, and children's rights to practice, advocacy, and the development of public policy to improve the lives of children and families. The future of paediatrics lies, in part, in its historical roots, which are fully entwined with those of public health'.

So having made the case that an important part of paediatrics is promoting child health and that the ecological systems theory provides a theoretical backdrop and the Marmot Review a policy framework, what is the relevance of social capital and community development to paediatricians' work?

Social capital

Social capital is an idea that has been in circulation for more than a hundred years, in 1916 Lyda Hannifan wrote about local support for rural schools and used social capital to mean social cohesion and personal investment in the community;

'I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily life of people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit...If he may come into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors'.

However the idea remained dormant for many years and has only in the last twenty years become prominent, largely through the work of Robert Putman, a political scientist at Harvard University, who established the Saguaro Seminar, which aims to

Zara Hyde-Peters BSc MBA OBE Director of Strategy, Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, UK. Conflict of interest: none declared.

Doug Simkiss PhD FRCP FRCPC FHEA Clinical Director, Children and Families Division, Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, UK. Conflict of interest: none declared.

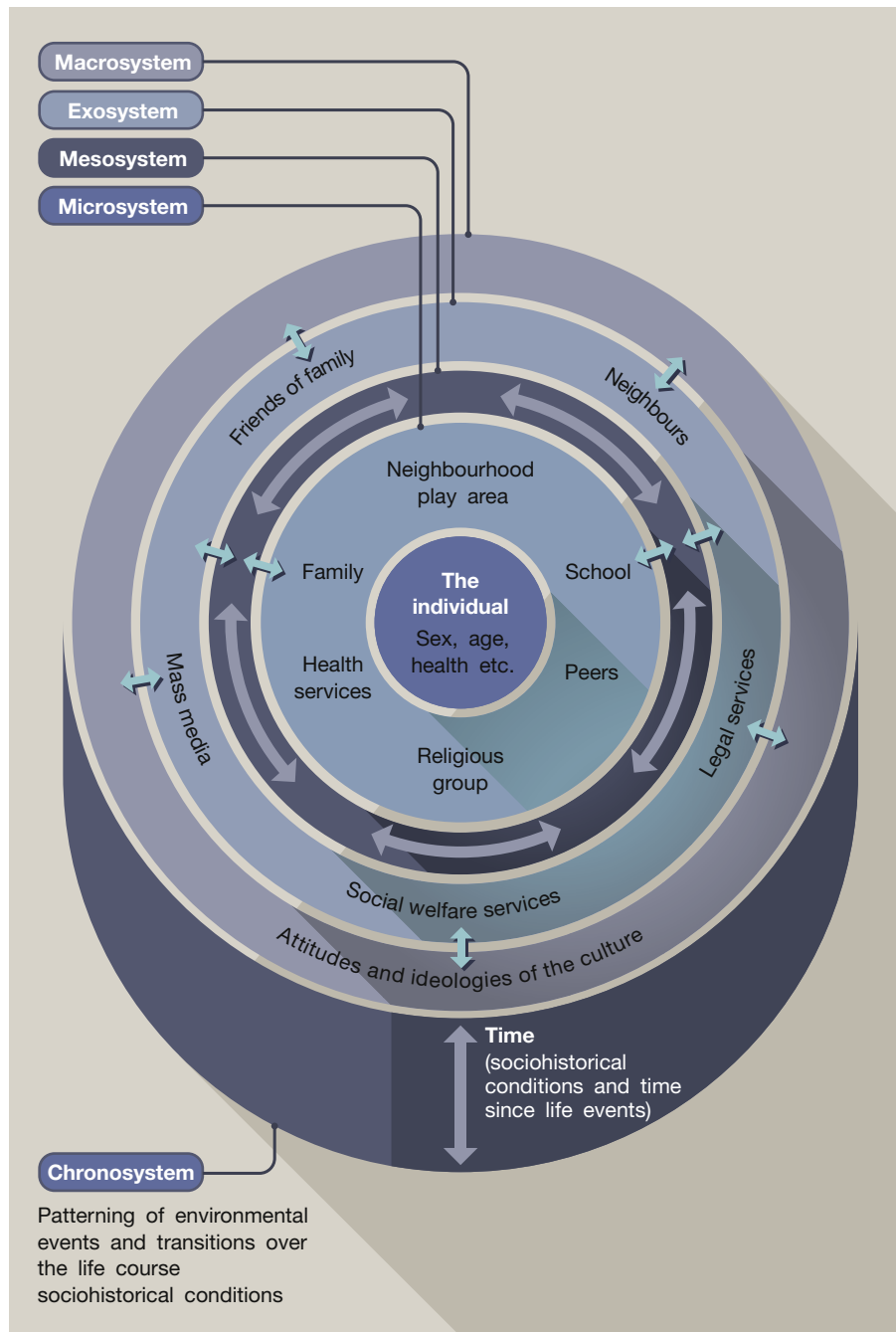


Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

improve social capital measurement and the availability of social capital data and to undertake analysis of building social capital in a changing environment (<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/>).

Defining social capital

One of the core issues with social capital is defining precisely what is meant and this has been a problem right from the beginning, as while the quote from Lyda Hannifin describes the concept nicely, an exact definition is difficult. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines

social capital as '*networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or between groups*'.

Daniel Aldrich from Purdue University describes three mechanisms of social capital, bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding social capital is the links to people based on a sense of common identity ('*people like us*') such as family, close friends and people who share culture or ethnicity. Bridging social capital is the relationship between friends of friends, so links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity to distant friends, colleagues and associates for example. Bridging social

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4172002>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4172002>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)