

# The Social Determinants of Mental Health

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# The Social Determinants of Mental Health

- Definitions
- Historical Context
- Key Concepts
- Evidence-Based Examples
- Best Practices/Solutions

Those factors that impact upon health and well-being: the circumstances into which we are born, grow up, live, work, and age, including the health system.

These circumstances are shaped by the **distribution of money, power, and resources** at global, national, and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices.

The social determinants of health are prominently responsible for **health disparities and inequities.**

*Health disparities:* differences in health status among distinct segments of the population including differences that occur by gender, race or ethnicity, education or income, disability, or living in various geographic localities

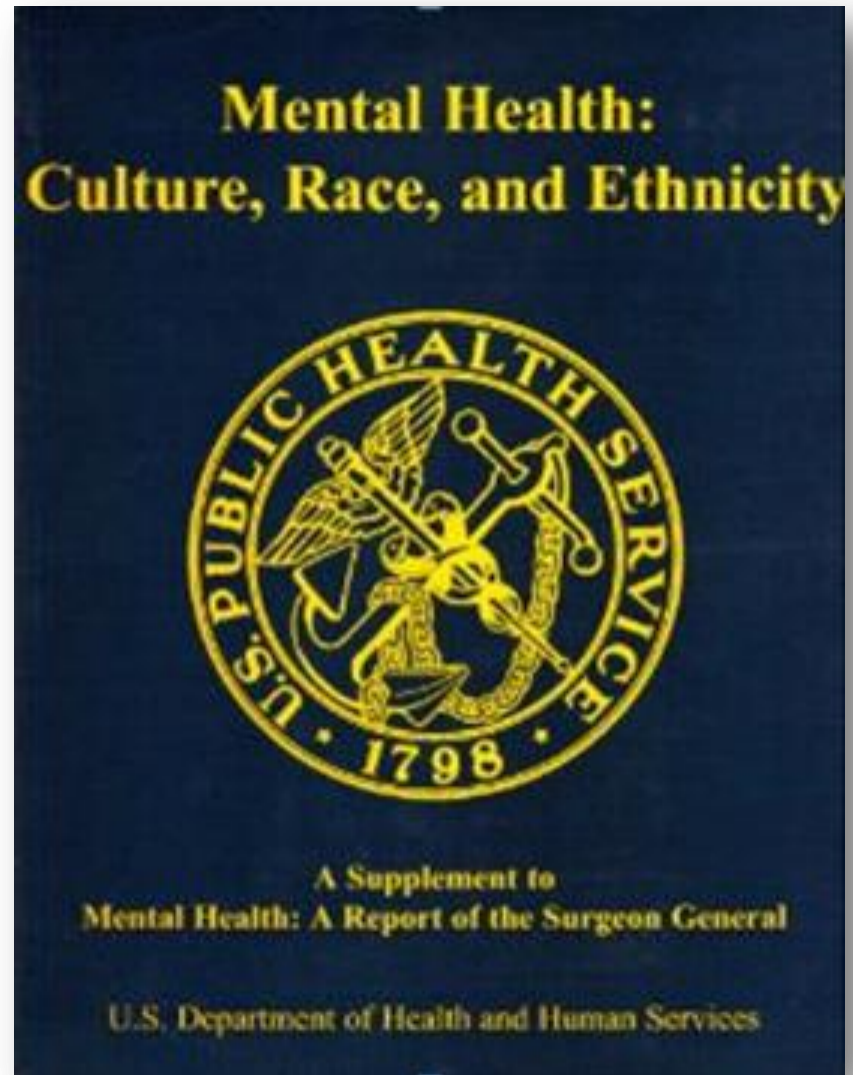
*Health inequities:* disparities in health that are a result of systemic, avoidable, and unjust social and economic policies and practices that create barriers to opportunity



Individuals with serious mental illnesses die, on average, up to **25 years earlier** than the general population.

# Culture Counts

“Even more than other areas of health and medicine, the mental health field is plagued by disparities in the availability of and access to its services. These disparities are viewed readily through the lenses of racial and cultural diversity, age, and gender.”





Social Justice

# Defining Social Justice

The distribution of good (advantages) and bad (disadvantages) in society, and more specifically *how* these things should be distributed in society. It is concerned with the ways that resources are allocated to people by social institutions.

-David Miller-

# Defining Social Justice

Assuring the protection of equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society.

-John Rawls-

# How Does Social Justice Relate to Health?

- Social justice is considered **the moral foundation of public health.**
- It is concerned with human well-being.
- It ensures that individuals in a society have equal opportunities to lead healthy, meaningful, and productive lives.

*Suicide* (1897)

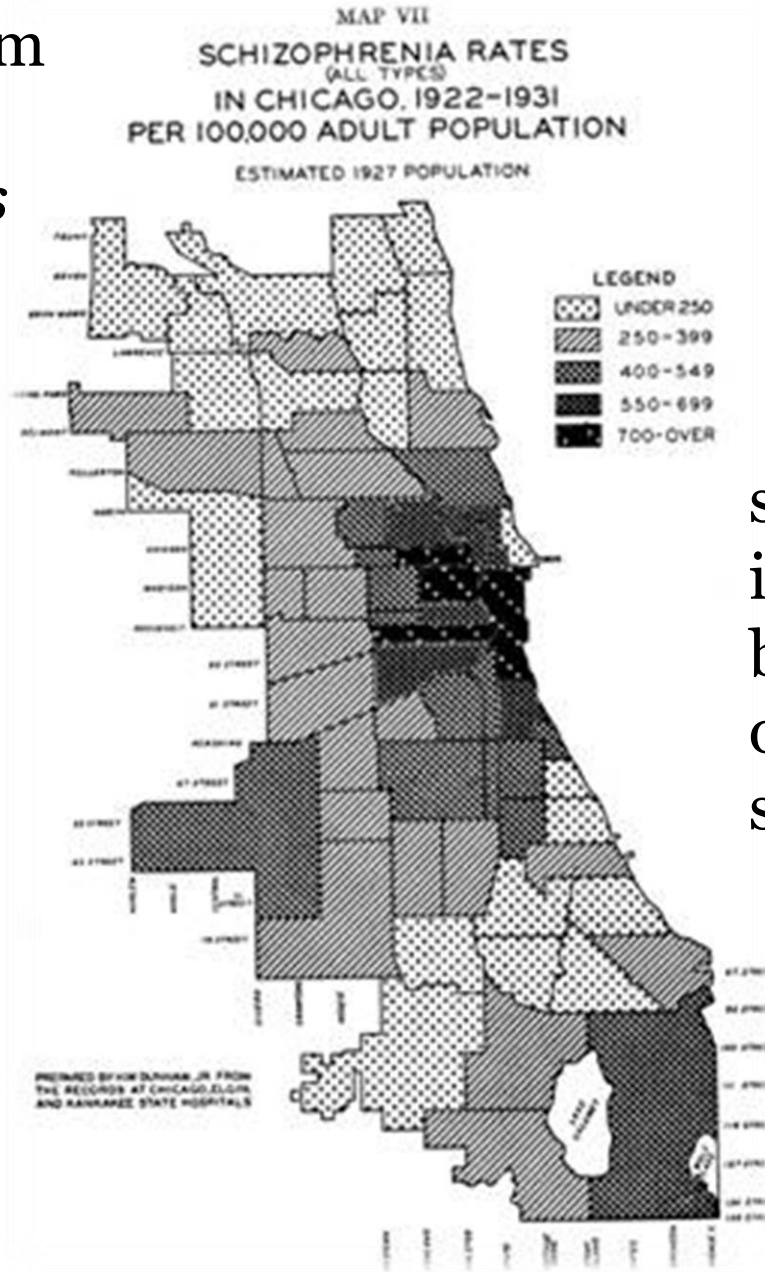
demonstrated the relationship between social exclusion and suicide

described suicide as a social phenomenon



Faris and Dunham  
(1939)

*Mental disorders  
in urban areas:  
an ecological  
study of  
schizophrenia  
and other  
psychoses*



suggested an  
inverse relationship  
between social  
organization and  
schizophrenia

# The Rise of Biological Psychiatry

- Shift in the field to the individual factors associated with mental illness – molecular and genetic risk factors and determinants
- This movement has led to major strides in research and treatment of mental illness
- Advances in genetics, neurobiology, and pharmacology
- An unfortunate byproduct is that focus has moved away from examining how social processes contribute to mental illness

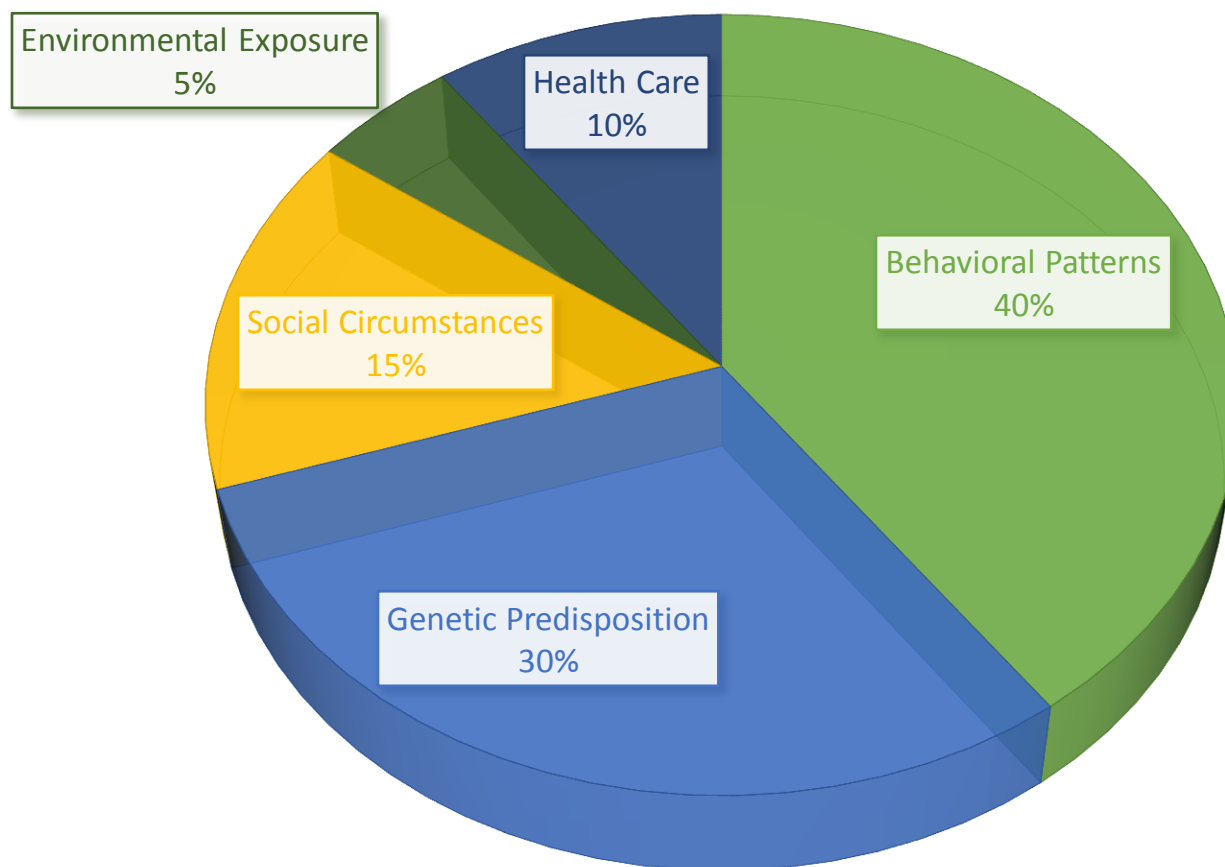


# Nature *and* Nurture

- Previously presented as two competing realms at odds
- The interplay between biology and the environment is key
- One cannot understand biology without understanding the socio-environmental context
- Mechanisms underpinning social factors cannot be understood without considering neurobiology



# Determinants of Health and Their Contribution to Premature Death



# The Causes of the Causes

*“The Fundamental Causes of Disease”*

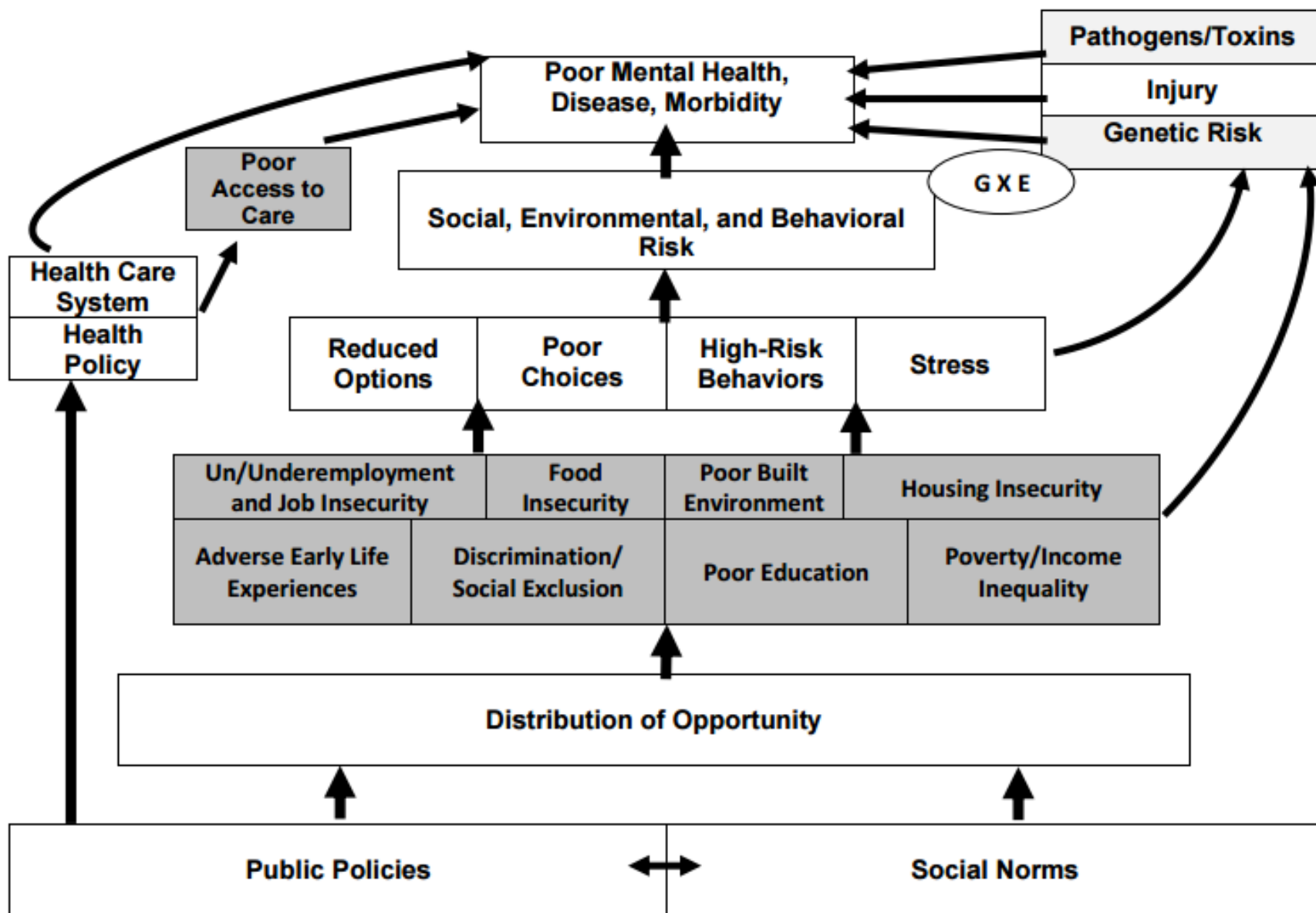
If risk factors are the precursors of disease, then the environmental and contextual factors that precede or shape these risk factors are **the causes of the causes.**

A young green plant with two leaves is growing out of a crack in a grey asphalt surface. The background is a blurred, light-colored ground. The entire scene is framed by a thin black border.

# *The* **Social Determinants of Mental Health**

Edited by  
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**Ruth S. Shim, M.D., M.P.H.**

# Conceptualizing the Social Determinants of Mental Health



# Adverse Early Life Experiences

Inconsistent, threatening, hurtful, traumatic, or neglectful social interchanges experienced by fetuses, infants, children, or adolescents.

# The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

## Abuse

- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

## Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

## Household Dysfunction

- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

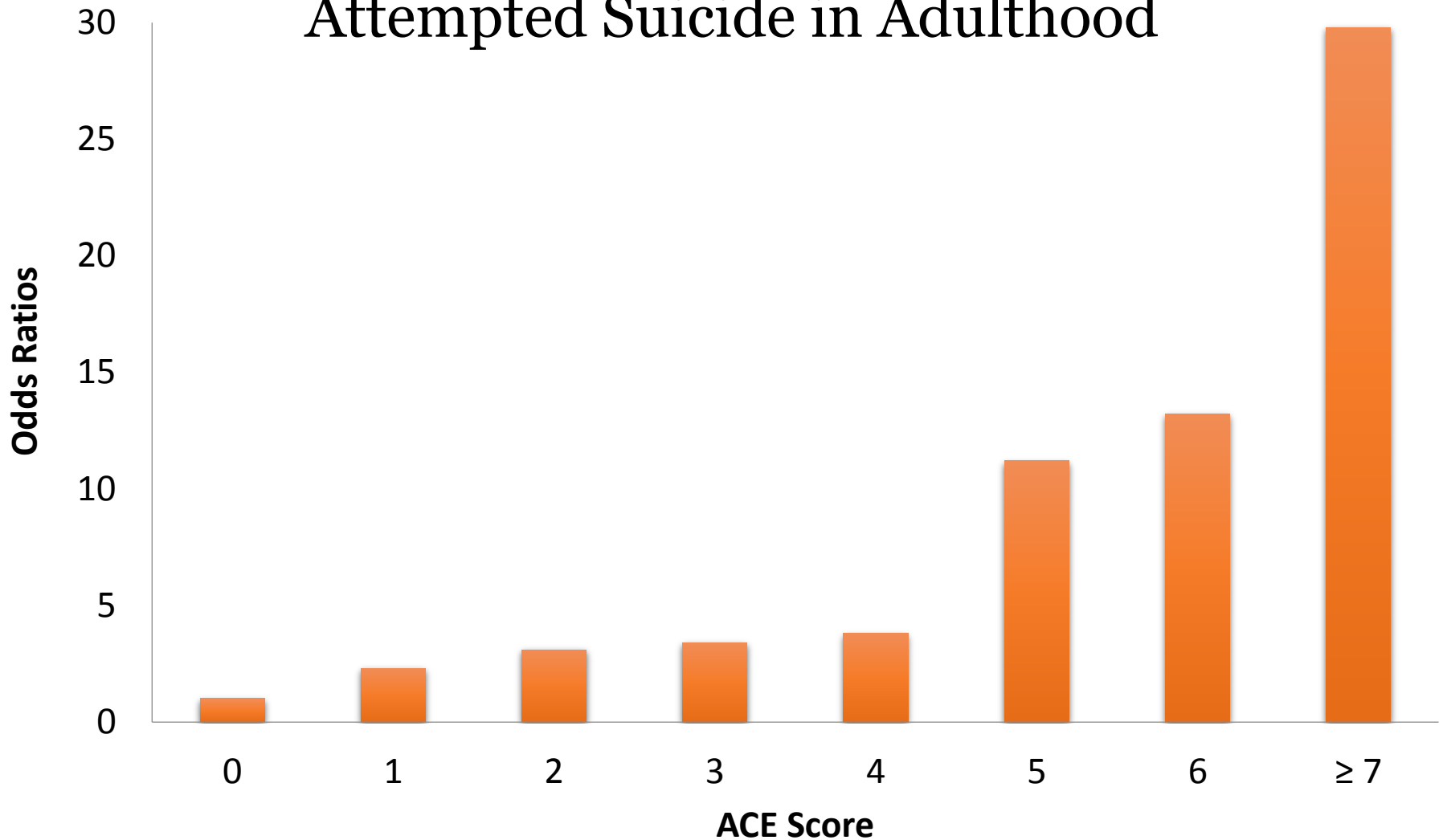
# ACEs are Highly Prevalent

**More than 60%**  
of the population  
surveyed reported  
one or more ACEs.

# Health Problems Associated with ACEs

- Alcohol use disorders
- Depression
- Illicit drug use
- Suicide attempts
- Teen pregnancies
- Smoking
- COPD
- Fetal death
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Hearing voices
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Multiple sexual partners
- STDs
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Early mortality

# Relationship of ACE Score to Having Attempted Suicide in Adulthood



Dube SR, Anda RF, Felitti VJ, et al. Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide Throughout the Life Span. *JAMA* 2001;286(24):3089.

# Poverty and Income Inequality

- Federal poverty line (2015)
  - \$24,250 for family of four
  - \$11,770 for one person
- “Near poor” is between 100% and 200% of federal poverty level.
- **14.8%** of Americans (**46.7 million**) were living in poverty in 2014

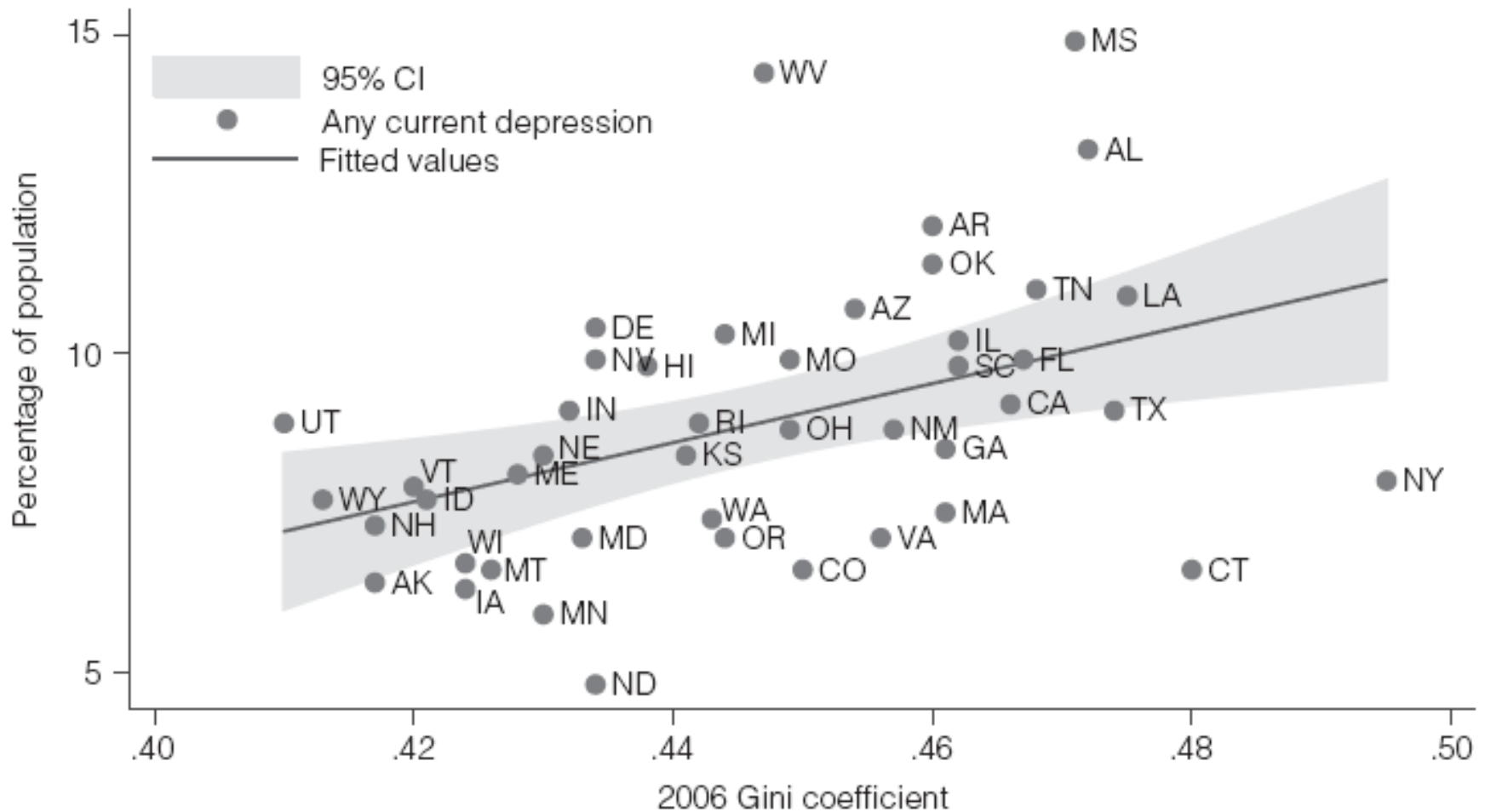
# The Juvenilization of Poverty

About **40% of children** in the United States are poor or near poor.

# Mental Health Related Outcomes Associated with Poverty and Income Inequality

- Depressive disorders
- Poor self-reported mental health
- Drug overdose deaths
- Juvenile homicides
- Delinquency
- Anxiety disorders
- PTSD
- Increased arrests
- Cognitive, behavioral, and attention-related problems in children

# Inequality and Depression Prevalence by State

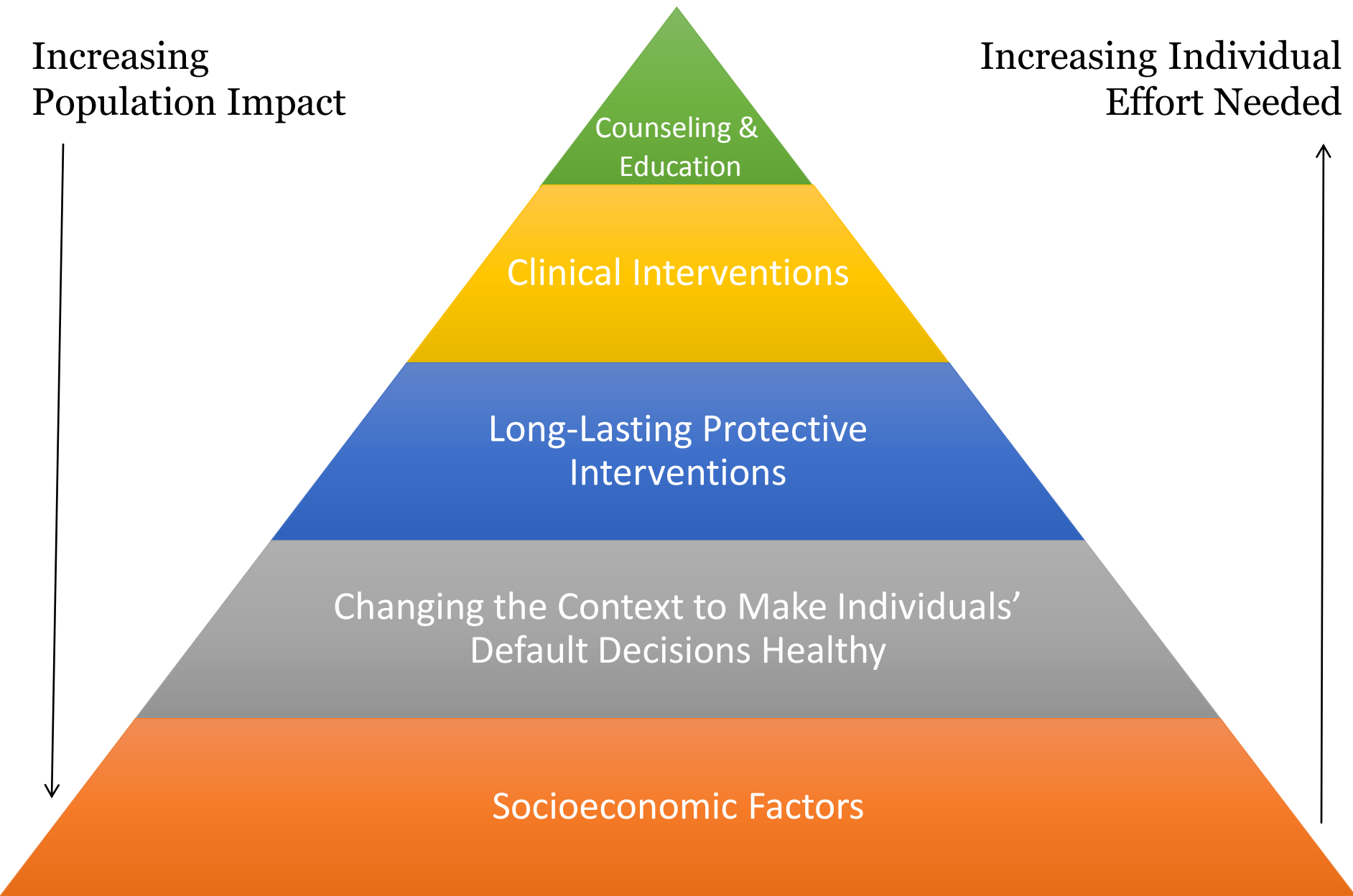




“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Being willing is not enough, we must do.”

Increasing  
Population Impact

Increasing Individual  
Effort Needed

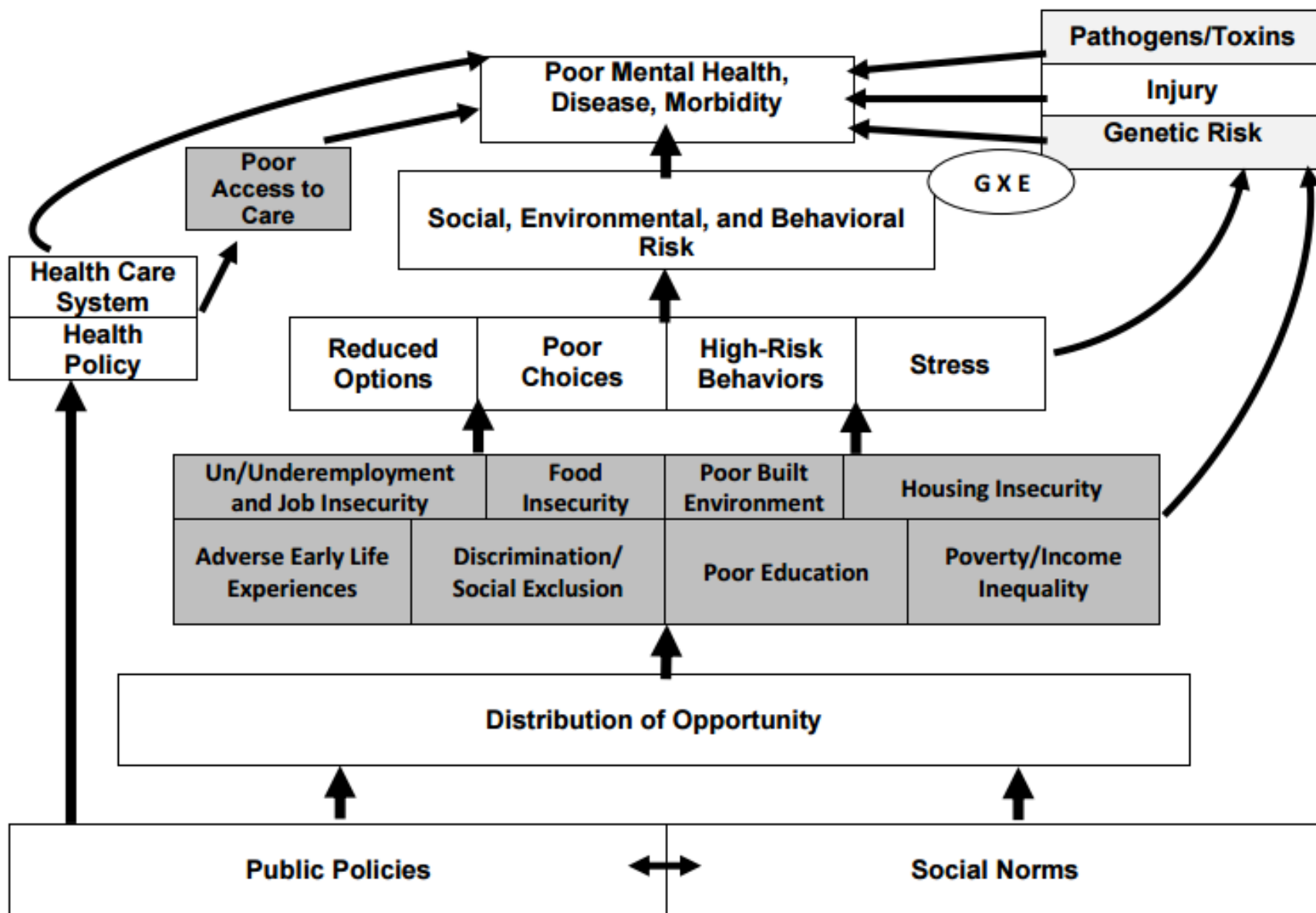


Frieden, T.R. (2010). A Framework for Public Health Action: The Health Impact Pyramid. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(4), 590.

# Success in Addressing the Social Determinants of Behavioral Health

- Nurse-Family Partnerships
- High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and Head Start
- Good Behavior Game
- Health Leads
- Medical-Legal Partnerships

# Conceptualizing the Social Determinants of Mental Health



# Clinical Interventions

- Screening and preventive interventions.
- Addressing policies in work settings
- Developing resource guides for clients and staff.
- Referring clients to available supports (supported employment, supported education, supportive housing, poverty assistance programs, SNAP benefits, etc).

# Policy Interventions

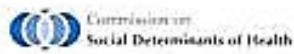
## Public Policies

- Advocate for policies and laws that improve education, increase employment opportunities (or extend employment benefits for the unemployed), decrease food insecurity, end discrimination, improve housing standards, etc.
- Offer your expertise to your elected officials (individually, or through professional organizations)
- Cross-sector collaborations are key

# Policy Interventions

## Social Norms

- Community Education and Engagement
  - About the importance of cultural competence
  - About the negative impact of stigma
- Use laws to change norms
  - Create a culture of tolerance and acceptance
  - Speak up when this culture is not respected



# Closing the gap in a generation

Health equity through action on  
the social determinants of health



**“Reducing health inequities is...an ethical imperative. Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.”**