Conceptual and methodologic considerations on the contributions of work to health disparities

Ana V. Diez Roux MD PhD
Professor and Dean
Dornsife School of Public Health
Drexel University
Outline

• Alternative conceptualizations of “work” as a contributor to health disparities

• Work as an integral part of the systems that generate and sustain health disparities

• Implications for research
Three alternative conceptualizations of work as a contributor to health disparities
Work as an indicator of social class

Occupation (and work relations) as a reflection of location in system of production-fundamental driver of inequities.
Work as an antecedent to health-relevant resources

Things that work provides that in turn have health implications.
Work conditions as part of the processes/mechanisms linking social class and race/ethnicity to health

Things that work does to one or that happen to one while one is at work.
Work a social class marker, as an antecedent to social conditions and as a source of “exposures”.

- Race/ethnicity
- Social class
- Occup.
- Work conditions
  - Env exposures/hazards
  - Behaviors
  - Stress-related & psychosoc
- Social and economic consequences
  - Income and wealth
  - Neighborhood conditions
  - Education
  - Social networks
  - Health care access

Mediators → Health
Simultaneous impact of the three conceptualizations

- Occupation as a fundamental driver of social class
- Implications of work for income and other health-relevant resources
- Specific conditions at work
Work as an integral part of the systems that generate and sustain health disparities

- Interactions (synergisms)
- Feedbacks
- Effects distant in time
Synergistic effects of work, stress, and neighborhood context

- Service job
  - Low income
    - Long hours
      - Limited free time
        - Stress
          - High poverty neighborhood
            - High density of fast foods around home
              - Obesogenic diet

Synergism
Feedbacks between work and health over the life course and across generations

- Parental work
- Parental health
- Leave policy
- Family income
- Child education
- Child health

- Child health as an adult
- Child work as an adult
Implications for research

• Specify clear conceptual model and where “work” fits in

• Evaluate design and analytical implications

• Consider a standard set of work-related measures for inclusion in multiple studies
Implications for research (cont.)

• Describe how work and work conditions differ by race-ethnicity, gender, SEP---role of structural inequality and racism

• Focus on added value of work—policy relevant features/ameliorable to intervention

• Interaction of work with other domains

• Complementarity of methods-quant, qual (case studies), cross country comparisons
Big policy-relevant question examples

- Conditions at work: exposures at work, organization of work (e.g. control)—esp service work
- Conditions of employment: “flexible” employment, remote work, hours, leave policies
- Consequences of work: compensation, time, social mobility
Thank you!