**Lecture Notes for Chapter 16: Environmentalism**

The “person-in-environment” principle is integral to social work practice worldwide. The perspective highlights the importance of understanding an individual and individual behavior in relationship to the environmental context in which that person lives and acts. An alternative to the commonly used disease and moral models, the person-in-environment model is client-centered, dynamic and interactive. As with efforts toward social justice, environmental social work highlights the inequalities and inequities experienced by the poorest and most marginalized populations.

Environmentalism and Social Work

Interventions are needed to address natural, human-influenced, and global environmental changes such as pollution and climate change. The social work profession has played an early and important role in raising awareness of environmental justice.

* Social Work Leadership in Environmentalism
  + Mary Richmond – A leader in Charity Organization Societies in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These were the first organizations to develop a structured profession devoted to social work. Richmond developed casework practice and focused on the person-in-the-environment by connecting components of the environment to the daily life of people. She emphasized the shift from blaming people for deficits to recognizing the strengths and potential of individuals.
  + Jane Addams - Cofounded Hull House in Chicago with her friend Ellen Starr. They focused on the living and working conditions of immigrants, which were negatively impacted by the unregulated factories. Hull House challenged the housing, sanitation and public health of crowded tenements and by doing so raised the public’s consciousness. As a result of their efforts, Chicago hired its first garbage inspector, which helped to link the government with environmental issues.
  + National Association of Social Work - In 1999 the Delegate Assembly of the NASW stated that: “environmental exploitation violates the principle of social justice and is a direct violation of the NASW Code of Ethics”. As a result, social work came to explore, if not fully embrace, natural environmental issues as part of the profession’s mandate.
  + Council on Social Work Education - The CSWE is the national accrediting body of social work education programs. In 2010, the CSWE declared that sustainability, or using resources in such as way as to maintain them for the future, was the social justice issue of the new century. Community organizing, networking, advocacy and program evaluation are but a few skills that can be used to further environmental justice and promote the inclusion of the natural environment into work with clients.
* Ecological Social Welfare and Practice - all aspects of society are intricately related to each other. Ecological social welfare, sometimes called the New Ecology, is defined as a social change process that promotes people’s welfare and environmental justice through economic activities, such as examining the impact deforestation has over the control of river ways and subsequent flooding and landslides.
  + Sustainability - The sustainability movement acknowledges the finite nature of resources and prioritizes the needs of the poor. It necessitates a global perspective and a positive commitment to a process of social change.
  + Ecological Justice - From the perspective of ecological justice, the earth is a holistic life source, which means all life deserves justice. Ecological justice upholds a sense of fairness for all life. For social workers ecological justice is global; what occurs in one nation has a direct or indirect impact in many other geographic regions. For example, if a country neglects to implement policies on carbon emissions or ocean pollution, the impact is multinational.
  + Ecological Ethics - suggests that social workers must value nature for the sake of nature, not just for the sake of the uses to which human beings might put the elements of nature. If nature is highly valued then there might be times when people have to reconsider their needs and wants in light of natural resources. For example, ethical issues emerge when pesticide is used to increase the yield of food production, but health hazards might increase to those working close to the soil like immigrant workers.

Environmental Issues

* Overpopulation - one billion people are added to world’s population every 12 years. Currently the world population totals over 7 billion people. The rate at which a nation’s population is growing has immense consequences related to resources allocation, overcrowding, social conflict, housing, and health conditions.
  + Doubling time - how long it takes for a population to double. The calculation of doubling time is based on the extent to which birthrate exceeds the death rate. The countries that tend to experience the fastest doubling times are those who are developing their economic base through industrialization and can least afford the cost associated with a growing population.
  + Not due to families having more children. Family size has not grown worldwide. What has changed is that more people are living to the age of fertility and the mortality rate of babies has decreased. These changes as related to improved nutrition, advances in health care, improved sanitation and improved responses to natural disasters.
  + Challenges of overpopulation
    - *Global Water and Sanitation:* Global access to clean water, adequate sanitation, and proper hygiene are essential for improved health conditions and socio-economic-development. It is estimated that 780 million people worldwide do not have a safe water supply and appropriate sanitation.
    - *Global Hunger:* Hunger, or food insecurity, refers to conditions where people do not have physical or economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Although global hunger has decreased 34 percent in the last decade, more than 840 million people worldwide still do not have enough to eat with nearly 3 million children dying from hunger-related causes.
    - *Energy:* Consumption of energy resources extracted from the earth, including fossil fuels, leads to lower-quality, less-accessible, and more-expensive energy. The likelihood of blackouts, heating crises, rising fuel prices, and dependency on foreign markets increases as it becomes harder to extract fossil fuels.
    - *Overcrowding:* Increasing urbanization continues throughout much of the world. When more people are living within a dwelling, space for movement is restricted, and hygiene, privacy and a quiet environment for sleeping become less available.
    - *Migration* – Approximately 3% of the people in the world have lived outside of their country of birth for a year or more. Migration across national borders is called the “third wave” of globalization, after the movement of goods (trade) and money (finances). The majority of people moving from their original country move as a result of poverty and subsequent poor living conditions.
* Pollution
  + *Air* – Created by industrial fumes, vehicle emissions, carbon grit, and other airborne material that contaminates the air and depletes the ozone, a region above the earth that absorbs the sun’s radiation. Some of the diseases caused by air population are inflammation of the lungs, infections, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, and heart disease.
  + *Water* – Causes include the release of sewage and wastewater, marine dumping, industrial waste, radioactive waste, oil pollution, underground sewage leakages and global warming. Some diseases related to water pollution are: birth defects, cancers, immune suppression, reproductive failure, infant mortality, cholera, and typhoid fever.
  + *Land* - Causes include solid waste, pesticide and fertilizers, chemicals, deforestation, and ashes from non-biodegradable products or chimneys and inclinators. The harmful effects include repository problems, skin diseases, and various types of cancers.
* Climate Change – Includes changes in temperature, precipitation, and wind pattern changes.
  + Greenhouse effect - Certain long-lived gases remain semi-permanently in the atmosphere. These gases blanket the earth and disrupt the transfer of heat, a process referred to as the greenhouse effect. Gases that contribute to the greenhouse effects are: water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons. The burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil increase the carbon dioxide and adds to the greenhouse effect.
  + Potential outcomes - Warmer temperatures, more evaporation and precipitation, the melting of glaciers and other ice, increasing sea levels, and impacts on plant communities. Climate change poses serious threats to human communities as well, in the form of water quality and availability, potential increase in forest fires, economic hardships of its residents from crop failure and potential extreme weather conditions.
* Environmental Disasters – Lead to the loss of homes, personal property, and livelihoods.
  + Floods – can develop slowly giving people a chance to save some personal property and evacuate the area, or can develop in a matter of moments catching people by surprise and leaving few opportunities to gather belongings and depart to a safe region.
  + Drought
* meteorological - involves a departure of precipitation from normal.
* agricultural – occurs when the moisture in the soil does not sustain a particular crop region.
* hydrological – relates to the surface or subsurface water supplies that are below normal.
  + - socio economic – happens when physical and water shortages begin to affect people.
  + Hurricanes – Due to the tracking of hurricane conditions, residents in harm’s way often have time to evacuate their homes before lives are in danger. However, the damage to homes is often considerable resulting in mental health conditions like stress and depression. Social workers trained as first responders to disasters can better prepare people and communities before and after storm devastation.
  + Volcanoes - An erupting volcano can trigger tsunamis, flash floods, earthquakes, and rock falls. They result in mass evacuations.
  + Famine - The scarcity of food is the cause of hunger, malnutrition and starvation. Famine is associated with the over drafting of groundwater, flooding and other natural events that destroy crops, wars, internal strife, and inefficient distribution of food. Famine is especially common in Sub-Saharan Africa and portions of Asia, where it causes extensive deaths.

Diversity and Environmentalism

* Age - flooding, famines, hurricanes, and drought cause a disproportionate amount of hardship and death for older people, who have a more difficult time moving out of harms away, have a reluctance to evacuate, and may experience geographic and social isolation.
* Class - poor people suffer the greatest losses from natural disasters, in both developing societies and industrialized nations. Poor people, who tend to be relegated to living in the riskiest areas, also have the most limited access to both preparedness resources and recovery resources.
* Gender - Women and other socially marginalized populations are least likely to have the social power, economic resources, and physical capabilities to anticipate, survive, and recover from the effects of massive or extreme environmental events.
* Sexual Orientation – “Queer ecology” integrates LGBT theories with those of ecology and relates patterns of domination and control over human diversity to patterns that impact the earth’s resources.
* Intersections of Diversity - In some cultures environmental and diversity factors intersect as reflected in traditional symbols, behaviors, values, institutions and religious practices.

Advocacy and Environmentalism

* Social and Economic Justice - All members of society need and deserve a healthy world in which to live, work and engage with others. The Environmental Protection Agency is the federal entity responsible for protecting human health and the environment. Environmental justice is the assurance that benefits of a healthy environment will be distributed to all members of society in an equitable fashion.
* Supportive Environment - Social work maintains a strong emphasis on the person-in-environment perspective, which considers individuals as active participants in a larger society.
* Human Needs and Rights - Concerns involving environmental issues interface with social worker’s typical concerns about promoting people’s mental, physical, financial, and social well-being. In all cases human rights are involved. The inequity is two-fold: People who are poor or discriminated against on some other basis are the ones who have to deal with most of the results of pollution, and that pollution is typically the result of affluence in which they cannot participate. When the environment is ignored, human rights are also.
* Political Access - Social workers have a history of advocating for environmental justice. For example, they have collaborated with established environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, to promote investigation of, exposure of, and resolution to environmental concerns.
  + Fracking - the process of drilling and inserting fluid into the earth to fracture shale rock in order to release natural gas. The decision to engage in fracking highlights many issues relevant to social work, such as the use of chemicals in a way that impacts well water and aquifers, the release of harmful compounds into the atmosphere, and possible health hazards. There is significant political debate on this topic.

Your Career and Environmentalism

* Social workers can help to inhibit environmental degradation that affects not only people worldwide but also the earth.
* Social workers have a mandate to serve the needs of people, especially those who are marginalized.
* Social workers can work on practice and policy initiatives that protect people from natural and human-influenced environmental changes.
* Social workers need to work cooperatively with people in other disciplines to respond to the symptoms and causes of that threaten the planet and all of life.
* Social work skills include advocacy, education, connecting to resources, serving as first responders to provide counseling, community planning, and rebuilding.