This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License. Your use of this material constitutes acceptance of that license and the conditions of use of materials on this site.
Section B

Human Development as an Underlying Process
Life Course Perspective Allows for Time

- How individual health changes over time
- Variation in determinants over the life span
- Long-term influences
- Accumulation of risk and protective factors
- Exposures that affect health only at certain points in life span
More Importantly

- Implicit *processes* underlying observed relationships between time and health
  - Key for theory, practice, and policy

- Ben Shlomo and Kun, 2002—natural history of biological systems and disease

- Not just interested in departures from the normal—“when things go wrong”

- Many of the outcomes of interest in public health are psychological, social, or behavioral
What Is Development?

- Process of intraindividual change over time (over individual’s life span)

- Transformational: change in the form, organization, or structure of a system
  - Increase in complexity results in novelty
  - Qualitative change, produces discontinuities

- Variational: change leading to deviation from an individual’s standard, norm, or average
  - Builds on existing capacity
  - Quantitative change, continuous
What Is Developing?

- Focus of theory is developmental process

- Focus of researcher is specific domain of human structure, function, capacity, behavior, or experience

- Here, more general view of outcomes; consider three broad domains: biological, psychological, and social
Physiological

- Biologically based systems inside the body
- Tissue differentiation, synaptic pruning, muscle growth, pubertal development, onset of frailty
- Not all change is in positive direction (frailty)
- Changes can be non-optimal (tumor growth, high-stress reactivity)
Psychological

- Inside the brain
- Attachment, increases in vocabulary, morality
Social

- Outside the body and brain
- Adoption of social roles, creation of social relationships, attainment of social positions
- Compose the social pathways of interest in life course research
- External circumstances important to defining social functions, capacities, behaviors, and experiences
Domains Intertwined

- Categorizing a particular function, structure, capacity, behavior, or experience as biological, psychological, or social is often incorrect and even impossible

- Some development is purely physiological, e.g., early embryonic development

- Becoming a parent entails elements of all three dimensions; so do the onsets of adolescence and attainment of adulthood
Key Features of Development

- Plasticity and diversity
- Extends across the entire life span
A Life Course Perspective

- Conceptualizes health as the reflection of an underlying developmental trajectory

- Trajectory is multidimensional
  - Biological, psychological, behavioral, and social aspects

- What “health” means varies by position on this developmental trajectory (i.e., by age)
A Life Course Perspective

- Conceptualizes health as the reflection of an underlying developmental trajectory

- Trajectory is multidimensional
  - Biological, psychological, behavioral, and social aspects

- What “health” means varies by position on this developmental trajectory (i.e., by age)