



Social Justice and Health Education

A Position Statement of the American Association of Health Education (AAHE)

Inequities have long been a thread running throughout society. These inequities have contributed to different levels of health status among various groups.¹ Health inequities have been identified as an injustice, and the elimination of health disparities has been incorporated as an overarching goal of the Healthy People 2010 initiative. Health disparities include differences in health status relating to gender, race, ethnicity, education or income, geographic location, sexual orientation and disability.² Health disparities persist, and in some cases have been widening, in the United States population in all categories.³ These health disparities are of particular concern because many result from conditions and policies outside the realm of control of the affected populations.⁴ Decreasing or eliminating these disparities will likely contribute greatly to increasing social justice.

Social justice is rooted in humanistic philosophy wherein it is recognized that all humans have intrinsic worth. It supports the notion that individuals, as citizens, should be able to have their basic needs met.⁵ Themes of social justice also include that individuals should have access to life opportunities and shared access and influence to forward social goals.^{4,6} Social justice relating to health is supported by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, indicating that “everyone has a right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”^{7(p.32)}

The values of social justice play an important role for effective and just health education initiatives. The planning, implementation and evaluation of health education and promotion programs require that social inequities be addressed in order to decrease health disparities and enhance the overall health of the population. The tenets of social justice applied to health education also mandate for the advocacy of beneficence, non-maleficence and empowerment for all people, particularly for those most affected by health and social inequities.⁶

Therefore, the American Association for Health Education actively supports the planning, implementation and evaluation of health education and promotion programs that address the themes of social justice, identifying and addressing factors that contribute to social inequities and health disparities in the population. The association also supports health advocacy efforts addressing health as an economic, social and human right.

References

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