

# Preface

The overall objective of this book is to provide theoretical and pragmatic discussions on medical sociology (sometimes referred to as health sociology) with African illustrations. It is an attempt to examine the various themes and topics in medical sociology with the aim of providing adequate explanations in instructive styles. It is particularly important to write from a local lens but through international perspectives. Medical sociology, although a branch of sociology, has attracted transdisciplinary relevance—especially in psychology, anthropology, health economics, medicine, nursing, history of medicine, and others. This book provides a frame of reference for those interested in the issue of society, culture, and health in general. It also intends to provide a globally renowned source and reference for academics, public health practitioners, undergraduates, and graduate students who want to improve their understanding of medical sociology.

This book emerges from the context of African experiences and perspectives, drawing classical illustrations and references from Africa. This book is adequately localised in the African context but with a global outlook. The epistemological stance of African sociology is rooted in deep cultural interpretations. Such perspective is necessary because Africa faces the majority of public health problems. The book will be useful in the teaching of medical sociology at all levels. It represents a compilation of detailed ideas about the significance and relevance of medical sociology. The book presents a shift from theoretical precepts to practical mindset within a pedagogical milieu that will aid the understanding of sociocultural or sociological approach in the study and understanding of health problems, and more importantly in the topical descriptions of medical sociology. This book is organised based on thematic issues in medical sociology. In order to represent current perspectives, recent directions in the field will be presented. As outlined in the table of contents, the work will also present more research agendas for medical sociology.

Africa bears the greatest brunt of many health problems, especially malaria, HIV/AIDS, and maternal- and child-related morbidities which are part of the health targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set to achieve considerable alleviation of disease burden. These morbidities are preventable through effective health and illness behaviours, but millions of fatalities due to the aforementioned diseases still occur in the continent every year. Millions of others are affected by

temporary and permanent disabilities annually. While there has been progress over the years at the global level, there is still insufficient progress in Africa, more specifically in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) where the disease burden adversely affects the development processes, thereby accounting for a vicious cycle of underdevelopment. The prevalence of medical problems in Africa is rooted in the interplay of social, political, cultural, and medical factors; it is also within this holistic context that disease burden can be understood and resolved. In fact, increased focus on social/community barriers to care could prove effective in reducing the disease burden in Africa. The idea of the interplay of this myriad of factors is not new, but the factors continue to explain disease burden and persist over the years.

In order to account for a holistic perspective, the social and cultural dimensions of human health must be adequately considered. This book presents medical sociology as the study of the social patterning of health and illness (see Chap. 1) by situating health problems as a major (social) problem confronting the human being. The first chapter also presents a brief history of medical sociology and the topical coverage of the discipline to advance the relevance of the discipline in health studies and provide adequate explanations for students. The notion of health, disease, and illness as conceptual tools is the preoccupation of Chap. 2, starting with the debate of how health should be defined. The illustrations of the social manifestation of illness and cultural beliefs of illness causation from African context show the relevance of the cultural milieu in the understanding of health (see Chap. 2). The concepts of health and illness behaviours are a central part of the discourse in medical sociology (see Chap. 3). It is vital to understand health risk behaviours, and the factors influencing such behaviours.

This book is also very strong in theoretical discourse. It presents the fundamental theories in sociology under the main broad headings. The notions of the sick role by Talcott Parsons, the explanation of suicide by Emile Durkheim, and social capital theory of health constitute the landmarks in functionalist explanation of health in sociology (see Chap. 5). Then the book presents many fundamental theoretical standpoints that could guide medical sociological thinking, including Marxist analysis/political economy of health, fundamental cause theory, feminist analysis of health, Weber's social action and bureaucratic rationality health belief model, theory of planned behaviour, Suchman's stages of illness and medical care, Andersen's model of health care utilisation, social construction of illness, labelling theory, and Goffman's theories of stigma and total institution. While some criticisms of the theories are also presented, some adaptations to African contexts were illustrated stressing the need for a holistic view.

In general, a sociology of health should provide a holistic milieu in the consideration of health discourse by accounting for a multitude of dynamics and situational indices within the social and cultural spheres responsible for the health of the population. Specifically, a sociology of health problems in Africa should provide comprehensive explanations considering the social patterning of health and the community indices and sociocultural factors influencing population health. It is a well-known fact that social determinants of health (SDH) (see Chap. 4), or what could also be referred to as fundamental causes of disease, have a global relevance.

However, the impacts of these SDH are more pronounced in the context of Africa, especially in the explanation of disease of poverty such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. The question of fundamental causes has a significant link with the political economy of health (PEH) (see Sects. 6.3, 6.4), health inequalities without neglecting health transition, and the emerging disease mix, especially as a result of lifestyle factors responsible for most chronic diseases (see Sects. 3.3.1 and 4.6). Therefore, a sociology of health problems in Africa is firmly rooted in the consideration of the social production of health (see Chap. 6), interpretive perspective or social construction of health (see Chaps 7 and 8), SDH (see Chap. 4), lifestyle factors, and risk behaviours (see Chap. 3).

The concepts of medicalisation, pharmaceuticalisation, geneticisation, demedicalisation, remedicalisation, medical enhancement, and models of client-practitioner relations are adequately examined with some current illustrations (see Chap. 9). For instance, the medicalisation of pregnancy, beauty, and death are explained as illustrations in order to expose readers to how medicalisation is penetrating all facets of life. The examination of medical pluralism in Africa (the coexistence of traditional and modern health care systems) provides another opportunity to examine the realities of health care in Africa (see Chap. 10). Subsequently, the current waves of sociology of bioethics are presented by introducing the meaning and varieties of bioethics and core areas of moral perplexities in health care to advance the sociological relevance in bioethical discourse (see Chap. 11). Lastly, the hope of presenting more African illustrations informs the chapter on the sociology of health problems in Africa (see Chap. 12).

Therefore, we hope that students, instructors, and researchers interested in medical sociology (or social dimensions of health) and with interest in Africa will find this book an informative and academic resource.

Medical Sociology in Africa

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