**Socio-Economic Positions: Are workers exposing themselves to harmful conditions?**

“A social model of health is a framework for thinking about health. Within this framework, improvements in health and wellbeing are achieved by addressing the social and environmental determinants”, the Determinants of Health (2009) From this, it has been discussed that within socioeconomic classes, the likelihood of standard working conditions falls when workers come from lower income, Keleher, H., & Macdougall, C. (2009). Health for these workers is said to be harmful, but exactly how, is what will be discussed in this essay, and to understand how we must first look at what is health.

Health is a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, The Determinants of Health (2009). Socio-economic position refers to the social and economic factors that influence individuals’ position in the economic structure, Regidor Et al (2010). To understand whether or not the lower the socioeconomic position, the more likely a worker will be expose to more hazardous conditions, we must first look at the classes and rankings of socioeconomic positions in society. According to the Victorian Department of Health, socioeconomic health can be categorised into specification categories; beginning with the individual, moving towards groups/family, then onto community then finally political/social and economical, The Determinants of Health (2009).

From this hierarchy it is possible to categorise health more specifically, and through this chart the level or standard of socioeconomic jobs or workplaces can be assessed. Focusing on lower socioeconomic jobs, this chart can explain why lower income households or workers are more likely to choose working conditions that can be harmful to their health. Beginning with the individual. Studies have shown that individuals that come from a poorer household, are less likely to be educated correctly on working conditions and self-health Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008) This means they tend to engage in riskier behaviour among other groups and as a result are more likely to engage in a workplace that is not safe, or as they are commonly known as, blue-collar jobs, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008). From this they are already a part of a community that tends to be a low-income or from a low socioeconomic background. As well as being more likely to come from an educationally deprived background, these individuals are also likely to come from outer suburbs that lack resources from the city. This means they tend to only focus on social, political or economical needs that are only related to their own class, Keleher, J., & Macdougall, C. (2009).

From this, we are able to see that it tends to be that those who are from a lower class or socioeconomic position are already at a disadvantage when entering the work force, and due to the fact they often do not have the right educational skills will find work in more harmful positions. These workplaces, such as bricklaying, plumbing, electrician and carpentry are careers that tend to be more open and subjective as to what is required of them. These careers are often seen as labouring careers, which, while being true, is often misconceived as meaning the workers must inevitably encounter ailments, Murray, G., et al (2004) This can be linked back to the poor educational resources these classes are exposed to.

To look at prevention for “blue collar” worker, addressing what illnesses, physical and perhaps psychological must occur first of all. Studies done on lower class workers have revealed that due to their lack of understanding they develop bad working habits and expose themselves to more dangerous conditions, Murray, G., et al (2004). Such ailments that develop are chronic back pain, stress etc. It is also noted that their health is affected in ways such as lack of exercise. Low intake of healthy food and even smoking habits develop as a result of work being unfulfilling, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008). These workers are also being exposed to environments such as work yards, unknown houses and with tools and machinery that alone are harmful without appropriate training.

The general pattern of better health among those socio-economically better off is found across time periods, demographic and various measures of SE position, Lynch, J.W, Kaplan, G. A. (2000). Prevention for these illnesses and various health issues primarily lies with unions and the government, because this is where the root of the problem begins, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008). However, recently, as recent as January 1st 2010, the Australian government introduced new laws that protect and serve as buffers for “blue collar” workers, The Determinants of Health (2010).

The lower socio-economic workers it seems are more likely to be exposed to more harmful working conditions due to their lack of education and environmental exposures. Their illnesses and health problems, physical and otherwise are contributed to a lifestyle that they are socially pinned to. It is clear that these workers are more likely to be exposed to dangerous or hazardous conditions. These conditions are being reversed though, with introductions of the workplace reforms, while lower socio-economic workers are still working lower standards of workplace safety, are starting to see a turn in the reforms, which is a step towards safer workplaces.

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