

Chapter 9

Integrating Human Rights, Equity, and Social Justice in Health Policies in America and Nigeria: Controversies, Problems, and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Persisting absence of human rights, widening inequality, and social justice in healthcare delivery systems within and between countries present significant challenges to the focus and practice of contemporary public health. This chapter compares how cases of human rights, equity, and social justice are integrated in America's and Nigeria's healthcare policies. Qualitative research and case study design were adopted. Data were collected from secondary sources, such as reviewed literature, textbooks, journal articles, government reports, and internet. Content and critical case studies analysis methods were utilized to analyze, explain, and compare America's and Nigeria's health policies. Findings reveal absence of human rights, equity, and social justice among sub-groups in healthcare service delivery in America and Nigeria. The chapter concludes by suggesting that human rights, equity, and social justice should be integrated into health policies of America and Nigeria in order to make access to healthcare service delivery a right for citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the cardinal objectives of good government is to have effective healthcare delivery system put in place for the entire citizenry. A healthy nation is “a wealthy nation because of the absence of debilitating diseases and epidemics in such a country, which along with hunger and squalor impoverishes the citizenry” (Nwatu, 2000, p. 12). The indispensability of good healthcare system in national development underlies the government’s commitment to provide adequate healthcare.

The right to the highest attainable standard of health requires a set of social criteria that is conducive to the health of all, including the availability of health services, safe working conditions, adequate housing and nutritious foods. The right to health include both freedoms and entitlements. Freedoms include the right to control one’s health and body and to be free from non-consensual medical treatment and experimentation. Entitlements include the right to a system of health protection that gives everyone an equal opportunity to enjoy the highest attainable level of health. Violations or lack of attention to human rights can have serious health consequences. Overt or implicit discrimination in the delivery of health services violates fundamental human rights and social justice.

Health policies and programs have the ability to either promote or violate human rights, including the right to health, depending on the way they are designed or implemented. Taking steps to respect and protect human rights upholds the health sector’ responsibility to address everyone’s health. The search for value-based and ethical policy has recently gained momentum and the global literature has called for further exploration of the role of ethics (equity), human rights and social justice in public health.

The purpose of the chapter is to investigate how human rights, equity and social justice processes are integrated into national health policies of America and Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Humans have rights to the resources necessary for health. The public code of ethics affirms by Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family. Health policy-making, therefore, involves complex processes where a mix of experience, politics, human right, finance, values and ethics all interweave. The failure of anyone component can be fatal to any policy.

In United States of America, from the Truman Administration to today, reform for healthcare has been seen as both progress and failure. President Truman recommended to congress a proposal for Universal Health Insurance coverage administered and paid

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