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Rethinking Holistically the Risk of the Urban Home on Health: An Analysis from the Focus of the Socio-Demographic Vulnerability

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Rojas M, Meichtry N, Ciuffolini M, Vázquez J, Castillo J. Repensando de manera holística el riesgo de la vivienda urbana precaria para la salud: un análisis desde el enfoque de la vulnerabilidad sociodemográfica. [Rethinking Holistically the Risk of the Urban Home on Health: An Analysis from the Focus of the Socio-Demographic Vulnerability.] Salud Colectiva (Buenos Aires, Argentina) 2008 Mayo-Agosto; 4(2): 187-201.

Objectives: To describe the approach for determining health risks of poor urban housing and to characterize the holistic conception as an option to analyze socio-demographic vulnerability using concepts such as social, human and physical capital, and the structure of opportunities.

Methodology: Descriptive analytical.

Results: The authors identify three ideas from the holistic approach: 1) healthy or unhealthy housing is developed through either protective or destructive processes, 2) the risk to health from housing must be analyzed from an interpretative proposal; 3) poverty is understood as a phenomenon of vulnerability and marginality.

Thus, they describe two types of resources and opportunities that households use to face the risks of precarious urban housing:

A) Active and passive resources, and structure of opportunities: the active is the combination of resources that a family owns for improving its wellbeing; the passives are material and non-material barriers that impede that wellbeing, either by lack of resources or for utilizing them in an inappropriate manner; the structure of opportunities is the family's access or lack of access to goods, services or activities.

B) These homes own a capital composed by the whole of human, social, physical or symbolic goods, which is used diversely by the family according to the time and place circumstances. For the authors, changing socio-demographic vulnerability in the home depends on two assumptions: the ability of its members to manage and transform the resources held and the ability for changing and accessing the structure of opportunities offered by the environment where they are involved.

Thus, to determine the threat of risk, this article brings three strategies of analysis of healthy housing situations, in reference to the components of capital that each house owns: 1) the vulnerability of human capital can be identified from the presence of the following factors: exposed/imposed population, social vulnerability and level of resilience. 2) The vulnerability of social capital can be examined under the exercise of two functions of government: the efficient use of technical networks and communal services, and the creation or restoration of health, social, safety, emergency, and cultural services. 3) The threat to physical capital in the housing can be analyzed by micro-location, housing, ownership status, materials, water, basic sanitation and fuel for cooking. Finally, the authors propose a nonlinear conceptual model for evaluating the risk of housing to health. In this sense, they listed six subnets of risk: exposure, fragility, resilience, vulnerability, context risk and physical risk. For the authors, information from population censuses and field data can be useful for evaluating these risks and the structure of opportunities.

Conclusions: For the authors, a holistic approach is needed to determine the risk of housing on health. The authors conclude that the focuses of vulnerability, equity, assets and structure of opportunities are changing the capacity for operating on the nature and social processes of reality.