

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES RELATED TO NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

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Rates of mental illness have increased dramatically over the past 15 years in the United States. Additionally, life expectancy has fallen over the past several years due to increases in death from suicide, opioid overdose, and alcoholic liver cirrhosis as reported by Case and Deaton [Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism. Princeton University Press, 2020]. Over the last decade some have questioned whether these changes are due to neoliberal capitalist policies and ideologies. Neoliberal capitalism incorporates theories of eliminating all restrictions on the market and decreasing government assistance programs as reported by Harvey [A brief history of neoliberalism, Oxford University Press, 2005]. Since then these policies have led to income inequality, disempowerment of workers, outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, inadequate social services, mass incarceration, institutional racism and an expensive and ineffective healthcare system as reported by Case and Deaton [Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism. Princeton University Press, 2020] and Nkansah-Amankra et al. [International Journal of Health Services 43(2):217-240, 2013]. Studies have shown that the consequences of these policies and ideologies likely have a role in increasing rates of mental illness. This paper will discuss how these factors increase mental distress and postulate ways that mental health professionals can advocate for change.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify ways that neoliberal capitalism has affected society and mental health.
2. Translate knowledge about how neoliberalism shapes our understanding of ourselves and others into clinical practice to challenge these views with patients and in their own lives.