



Essentials of Health Behavior

Social and Behavioral Theory in Public Health

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family for their support and tolerance, to all those at The George Washington University and at Jones & Bartlett Publishers who were behind the Essentials of Public Health series, and, importantly, to all those already working or planning to work on the front lines to help improve the lives and health of so many people in the United States and around the world. Your work is a testament to humanity at its best.

Mark Edberg, PhD
The George Washington University



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Prologue

From cigarette smoking, to eating habits, to our daily routine, our every day behaviors affect our health in ways that we often fail to appreciate or even notice. Beyond our individual behaviors, there are larger social and population forces at play in all of our lives, which serve to mold and further reinforce our individual behavior.

Essentials of Health Behavior skillfully combines an emphasis on individual behavior with a clear focus on the social factors that influence the “big picture”, population health perspective. Mark Edberg’s approach grounds the practical everyday behaviors within key theories of human behavior drawn from the social sciences. Building on this understanding of health behavior, *Essentials of Health Behavior* examines a range of methods for changing behavior and applies these to programs in health promotion and disease prevention.

Edberg brings to his writing the lessons of extensive teaching experience at both the undergraduate and graduate levels—at The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services and its Columbian College of Arts and Sciences he taught health behavior courses, as well as courses that focus on the impact of culture on health—as well as his training and experience as an anthropologist, and social researcher with a public health focus. As an anthropologist he has a unique understanding of the impact culture and social organization have on individual behavior.

Essentials of Health Behavior is a key book in the **Essential Public Health** series. Like the other books in the series it has been written to fulfill competencies expected from public health education, which will form the basis for the certifying examination of the National Board of Public Health Examiners.

Essentials of Health Behavior can be used in social science curriculum that looks at the many factors that affect health behavior. Health behavior is also a key building block for health education. Health professional educators in the clinical disciplines are increasingly coming to appreciate that good outcomes rest on understanding the social and economic factors that affect individual behavior. As the social and behavioral sciences become more integrated into the clinical curriculum, *Essentials of Health Behavior* will provide a structured curriculum designed to fulfill these needs.

The *Essentials of Health Behavior* text will be complemented by a Reader, which emphasizes the interdisciplinary approach needed to understand and change behavior. Background readings will provide students and faculty with a range of approaches to reinforcing and expanding upon the key concepts in the main text. The full list of materials in the **Essential Public Health** series can be found at <http://www.jbpub.com/essentialPublicHealth/>.

I am confident that you will benefit from the *Essentials of Health Behavior*, whether you are using this book for a course in public health, psychology, sociology, anthropology, health education, communications, or the range of other fields that are affected by health behavior.

Richard Riegelman, MD, MPH, PhD
Series Editor—*Essential Public Health*



Series Page

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ABOUT THE EDITOR:

Richard Riegelman, MD, MPH, PhD is professor of Epidemiology-Biostatistics, Medicine, and Health Policy and founding dean at George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services in Washington, DC.



Preface

Health promotion, education, and prevention programs ultimately focus on changing health behavior. But what do we mean when we say “health behavior”? Is health-related behavior really different than any other behavior? There is no reason to think it is. To help us understand it, then, we can draw from the fascinating, multidisciplinary, and ongoing quest to try and understand human behavior in general. That of course, is a big task, and no one book can cover that in any adequate way. What we can do, though, is provide an introduction to the kinds of theoretical approaches that are used, or could be used, in developing and implementing health promotion programs, and to show how such approaches are applied to real-life settings.

It is my hope that combining these elements together in one book will fill an important gap for undergraduate programs in public health, and will provide an important piece of the foundation necessary for understanding the field. It is important that students in public health have a solid grounding in social/behavioral theory, and particularly important that they gain a general understanding in this subject area before they proceed to a graduate program or move to direct involvement in prevention and health education programs that apply such theory. Why? Because proper use of theory in public health means, in part, the ability to place particular theoretical approaches in context, to have some sense of their origins, their underlying assumptions, their strengths and weaknesses, and the programs/situations for which they might or might not be most applicable.

More and more, public health interventions and their evaluations are guided by theoretical frameworks. Program goals, program components, and the types of data used as evidence of program success are thus built on specific theoretical underpinnings. Without at least a general background, application of theory can all too easily become formulaic and inappropriate—form without substance. A key aim of this book, in that sense, is to provide the groundwork for understanding, assessing, and effectively applying theory.

In that spirit, *Essentials of Health Behavior* is designed to:

- 1) introduce students to the relationship between behavior and a selection of major health issues;
- 2) provide an introductory background to the kinds of social and behavioral theories that guide our understanding of health-related behavior, and that form the background for health promotion and prevention efforts; and
- 3) explore some of the ways in which these theories and approaches are used in applied health promotion efforts.

In the first section, we will introduce the relationship of behavior to health, review a sample of current and ongoing health problems (domestic and international), and, in a broad sense, discuss the relationship of behavior to those health problems. In the second section, we will provide a context from which to understand theory, and survey theoretical perspectives from psychology, social psychology, sociology, and anthropology that offer explanations of human behavior, keeping in mind that health behavior is one domain of human behavior in general—thus linking the field of health promotion/prevention to the broader context of social/behavioral theory. The third section will introduce students to

theory-based program planning and application, providing real-world examples across a range of settings – including community, school, and workplace programs, global health, mass media/communications, and programs targeting special populations. This section will also show how theory links program design, implementation, and evaluation. In the fourth section, current issues in the applied field of health behavior/health promotion will be reviewed, and we will present some of the occupational and career possibilities for which material in the book is relevant.

Mark Edberg, PhD



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One can never attempt to do a book alone, and with that in mind, I am deeply grateful to a number of individuals who provided invaluable support and assistance in preparing this book:

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And of course, thanks to my wife Haykham and children Eleazar and Jordana for tolerating my ever-present box of book-related materials and work that have accompanied me everywhere over the past year.

Mark Edberg, PhD



About the Author

Mark Edberg, PhD is an applied and academic anthropologist by training with over 18 years' significant experience in public health, social and community research, as well as public health program development and evaluation. He is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Prevention and Community Health at The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, with a joint appointment in the Department of Anthropology. Dr. Edberg has been Principal Investigator, or Co-Principal Investigator, on numerous studies; for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies, focusing on HIV/AIDS, violence, and substance abuse prevention, minority health/disparities in health, and marginalized and at-risk populations. Currently, Dr. Edberg is Principal Investigator (PI) on a four-year research effort to develop and evaluate a youth violence prevention intervention targeting community-modifiable factors (funded by CDC) in a Latino community in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. He is also Co-PI on an effort to evaluate a sexual exploitation/trafficking prevention program, and lead consultant on a community assessment of HIV, STI/STD, and hepatitis risk among Latino youth. For the U.S. Office of Minority Health (OMH), he is a Co-Project Director on an effort to develop an evaluation framework for efforts by states and U.S. territories to eliminate minority health disparities, and Project Director on the continuing implementation of a Uniform Data Set (evaluation) for all OMH-funded activities.

Recently, Dr. Edberg was Co-PI on an innovative quantitative/qualitative study for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) on substance abuse and HIV risk among three Southeast Asian populations in the Washington, DC metro area. Dr. Edberg also directed an effort to develop an evaluation data system for all grant programs funded by the U.S. Office of Minority Health (Department of Health and Human Services). This system is now Internet-based, and was the result of two previous projects for the same agency involving in-depth evaluation of agency programs. The Department of Health and Human Services gave this project a Best Practices in Evaluation award. Other recent research efforts include: ethnographic research in the U.S.-Mexico border region on the public image of narcotraffickers, and the relationships between this public image to violence and other risk behaviors (this work is documented in a recent book published by the University of Texas Press); Co-PI for the Washington, DC site under the NIDA Cooperative Agreements to Evaluate HIV/AIDS Risk Behavior Interventions with injection drug and crack users; PI for two small NIH-funded efforts to research and develop strategies for reaching out-of-treatment drug users (for HIV testing) and to reach low-income Hispanic/Latino women towards the goal of increasing use of prenatal care and reducing infant mortality; field ethnographer for a NIDA study on risk behavior among runaway youth; and evaluator, trainer and other positions on a range of community intervention and social marketing projects concerning substance abuse, smoking, HIV/AIDS, and violence. Dr. Edberg has also worked, under USAID contract, in Honduras and Puerto Rico as part of a democracy development project.

With respect to his faculty role, Dr. Edberg was recently Health Promotion Track Director within the Department of Prevention and Community Health. At the graduate level he teaches Health Behavior and Health Education and Qualitative Research Methods; at the undergraduate level he developed and has taught two new courses in Social and Behavioral Theory for Health Education/Promotion and the Impact of Culture on Health. He has also has taught Research Methods in Sociocultural Anthropology and Psychological Anthropology for the Department of Anthropology.

Dr. Edberg's outside interests include music—he is founder, songwriter, lead guitar and vocals for an original modern-rock group called the Furies. In addition to performing at clubs and other venues, the Furies have performed at benefit and social issue-related events.



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