



“Causes of the Causes” Diagramming Methodology

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What are the root causes of a problem?

Sometimes it helps to diagram the “problem” to parse out the “upstream” contributing factors. This results in critical thinking. It often assists in discussing controversial, highly charged issues to get people to be able to discuss beyond “black and white” thinking.

Below is an exercise that JHA conducts when it teaches the root causes of health inequities in its workshops and classes. This example works at all age levels and on all types of problems. Examples of problems that our students have diagrammed are hunger, sex slavery, homelessness, depression, smoking, drugs, sick baby, diabetes, levels of lead in children, hate crimes, Latino youth in prison, and many more!

1. Class/Group Exercise (5 min)

- a) We often start with an example, a simple poem called “why is Jason in the hospital” which is read out loud to the participants.

Why is Jason in the hospital

"Why is Jason in the hospital?

Because he has a bad infection in his leg.

But why does he have an infection?

Because he has a cut on his leg and it got infected.

But why does he have a cut on his leg?

Because he was playing in the junk yard next to his apartment building and there was some sharp, jagged steel there that he fell on.

But why was he playing in a junk yard?

Because his neighbourhood is kind of run down. A lot of kids play there and there is no one to supervise them.

But why does he live in that neighbourhood?

Because his parents can't afford a nicer place to live.

But why can't his parents afford a nicer place to live?

Because his Dad is unemployed and his Mom is sick.

But why is his Dad unemployed?

Because he doesn't have much education and he can't find a job.

But why ...?"

- from **Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants>

- b) Together, the participants draw the Jason causes diagram on the board.

A set of questions can then be asked such as:

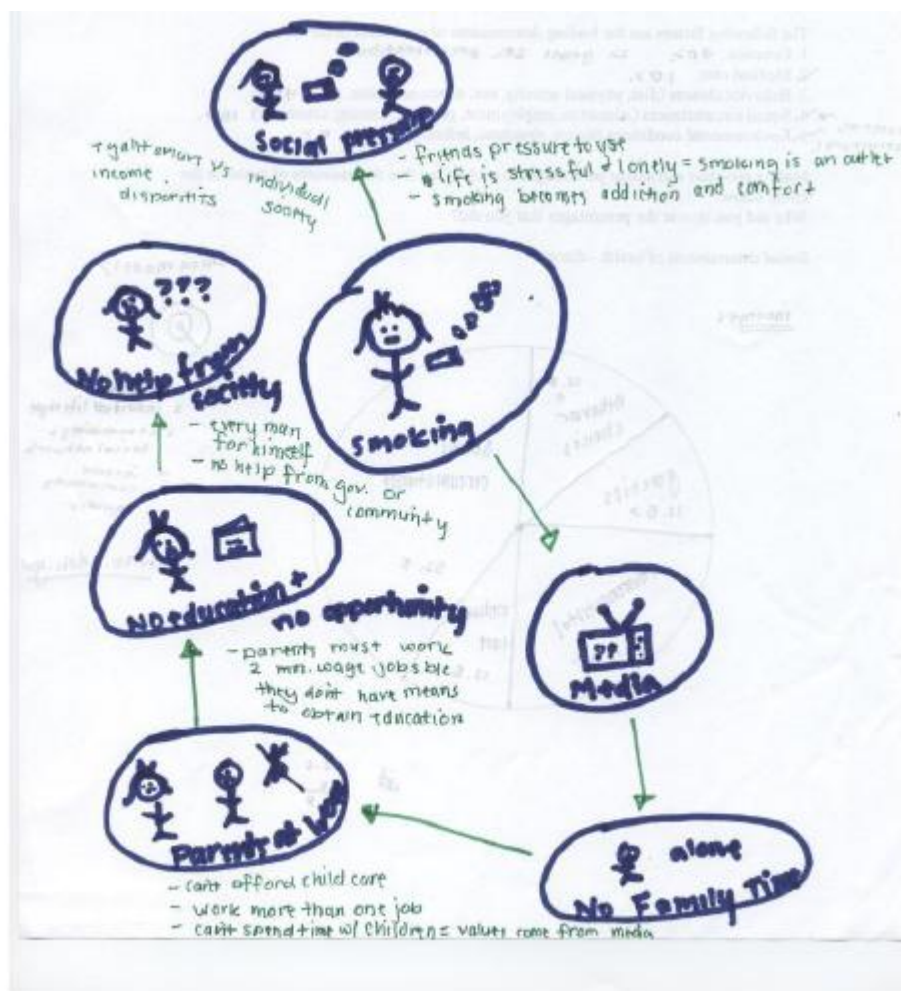
What would go after job?

2. Individual exercise (15 min)

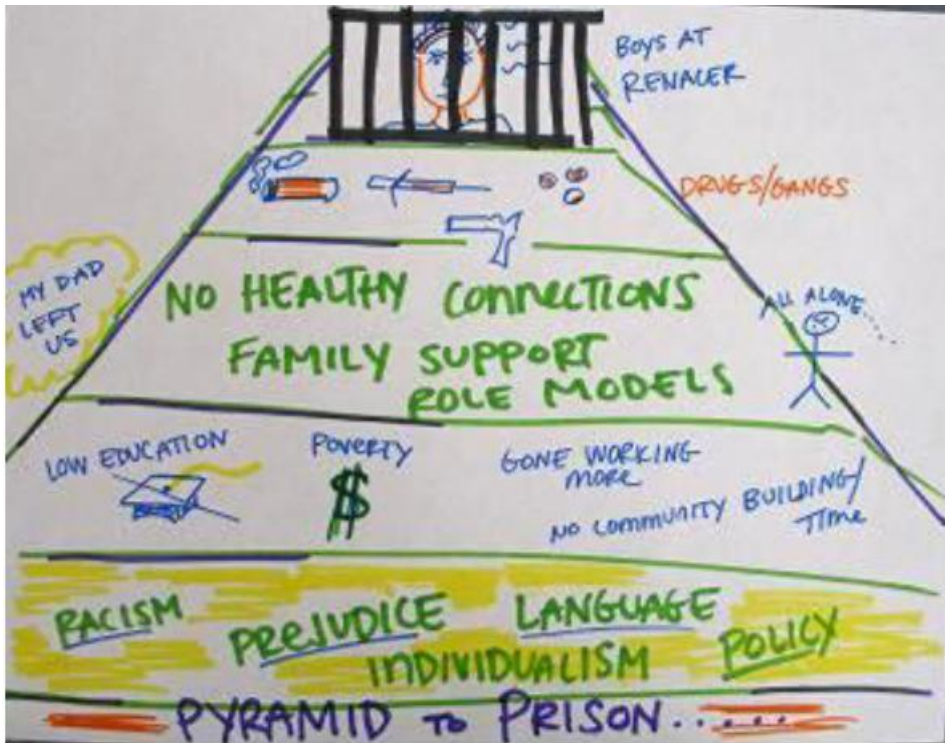
- a) What is the issue you are working on or that you are passionate about? What are the determinants (root causes) of the problem you are working on? Diagram it on a blank piece of paper
Some example diagrams are attached below.

3. Class, get together and share/explain your diagram. (15 min)

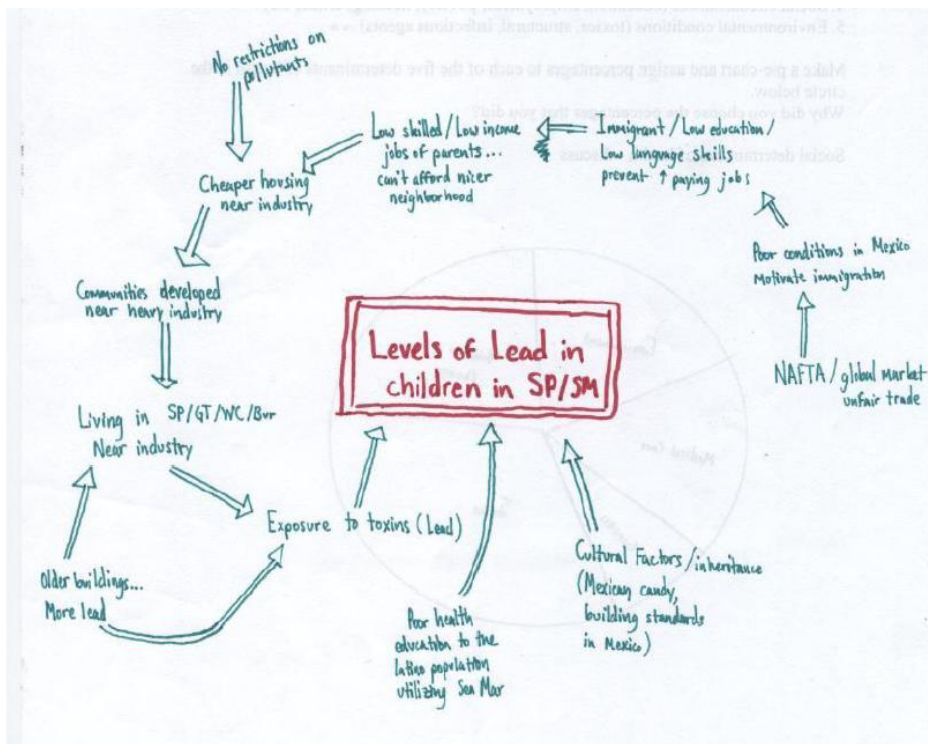
Are there a few common root causes (social determinants of health) that cross over all or most of the class?



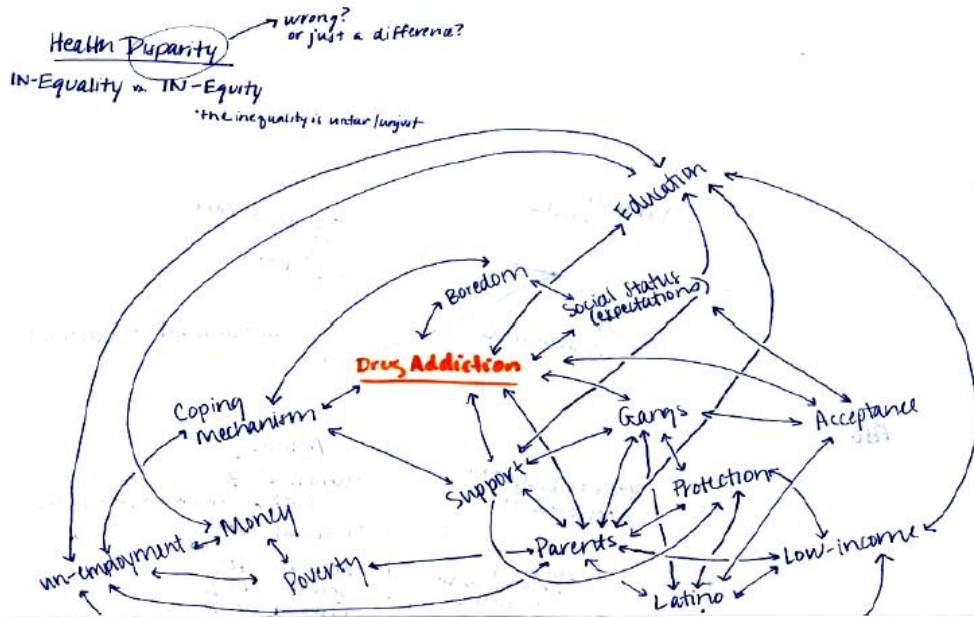
Causes of the causes diagramming: Smoking



Causes of the Causes diagramming: Pyramid to prison for South Park youth



Causes of the Causes Diagramming: Levels of lead in children in South Park, Washington



Causes of the causes diagramming: Drug addiction (Sea Mar Community Health Centers)