

*Running title: Mental Health Disparities*

*Social Work*

**Disparities in the Geography of Mental Health:  
Implications for Social Work**

**by**

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### Abstract

This article reviews recent theory and research on geographic disparities in mental health and their implications for social work. It specifically focuses on work emerging from the fields of mental health geography, psychiatric epidemiology, and social work. It argues that a wide range of spatial disparities in mental health are important to understand, but of greatest relevance are inequities, or disparities that violate fundamental norms of fairness and social justice. Research is reviewed on geographic variations in subjective well-being and mental health; on personality, using the Five Factor Model; on psychopathology; as well as several studies on the disparate implementation of mental health policy and services. Critical is the need to simultaneously assess, on one hand, the differential patterns of mental health conditions and, on the other hand, the services and policies designed to address them, that considering only one dimension often leads to unintended consequences. Many of the most outstanding disparities have been found to exist at the local level, between towns and neighborhoods, based on socioeconomic conditions. This review concludes by discussing the implications of geographic disparities in mental health for allocation decisions and for social work practice, including decisions about the most efficacious mix of services at both the community and clinical practice levels.

**Key Words:** Geography of mental health, health disparities, subjective well-being, quality of life, spatiality