



Traveller Women's Perspectives on Underlying Causes of their Food Choices: an Inter-agency Partnership working towards an alternative discourse & practice

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**A TRADITION OF
INDEPENDENT
THINKING**



UCC

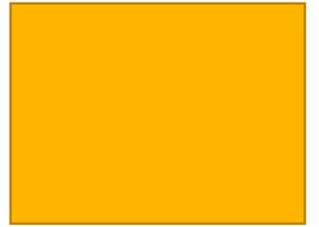
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Overview of Presentation



- **The Southern Traveller Health Network & its Research Question**
- **Research Process & Findings / Analysis**
- **Implications for Health Promotion Practice**
- **Inter-agency Partnership Actions**
- **Questions & Answers**

The Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN) & its Research Question



“Why, despite receiving health education on healthy eating and physical activity over many years are STHN members / Traveller women experiencing overweight & obesity & having great difficulty changing their food choices / food consumption & doing more physical activity / exercise?”

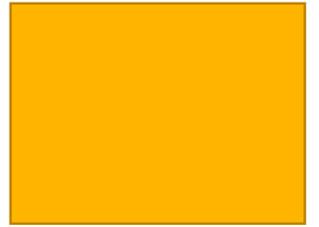
**A reflective question originating largely in a sense of self-blame & guilt
- but also - a sense that food choice isn't just about self-control**

Research Process & Dominant Themes in Findings



- **Inter-agency Research Partnership**
- **STHN & Dept of Epidemiology & Public Health, UCC**
- **supported by HSE South Health Promotion & Traveller Health Unit**
- **Community Based Participatory Research Methodology agreed**
- **3 Focus groups - 20 participants**
- **Psycho-Social Stress**
- **Cultural factors**
- **Social factors**
- **Individual level factors**
- **Environmental factors**

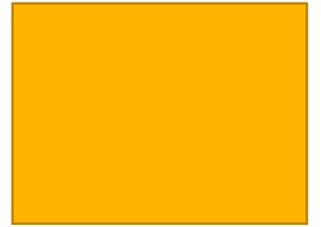
Psycho-Social Stress



- Traveller women experience high levels of chronic & acute stress
- They frequently experience worry, fear, grief & tragedy
- Roles as women, in an ethnic minority community, are extremely demanding, busy & constrained
- They experience pressure to conform to cultural norms
- They're expected to cope – Stoic
- Stress directly impacts on their food choice & consumption – comfort / emotional eating

“You carry your brothers, sisters, mothers, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces”.....“Do you know, such a one is coming and telling you their problems, you’re still here and you’re still like unconsciously carrying it too”.

Cultural Factors



- **Food Customs / Cultural Identity – hospitality & visiting**

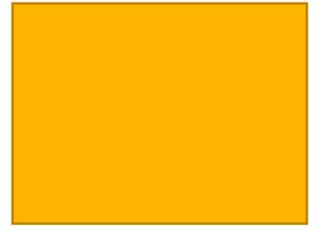
“You always put on a big dinner just in case because you’re always expecting other people are going to be there”.

- **Eating additional meals when visiting other Travellers**
- **Eating left-over food - dislike Food Waste**

“if no one shows up you eat it yourself”

- **Patriarchal culture - preferences of men & boys accommodated first**
- **Lack of routine at mealtimes**
 - In kitchen much of day ‘picking at food’
- **Collective culture - Family needs before individual needs**
- **Maintaining food traditions is important for a culture which is under threat**

Cultural Factors



- **Community & Personal History of Food Insecurity**

“You ate what was there because if it wasn’t there you done without it. Sometimes you wouldn’t know when you’d next get a dinner.”

- **Community & Personal History of Early Infant / Sibling Mortality**

- **Cultural acceptance of overweight**

- Fear of children being hungry
- Love shown through providing food
- Chubby baby / child is ‘strong healthy’, weight regarded as protective
- Weight gain is normal - related to pregnancy & motherhood

Social Factors - Racial Discrimination & Social Exclusion



- Life-long exposure to racism
- Lowers self-esteem/self worth
- Limits participation in wider society including Social Life, Physical Activity / Exercise

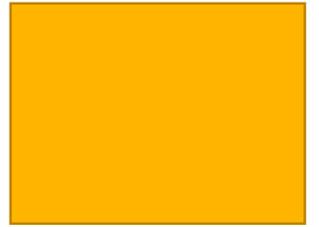
“What’s the point in making an effort to look good?”

- Discomfort among settled people & less contact than previous generations

- Equating their experiences of discrimination with that of Black people

“.... that’s why we can’t stop and talk to them [settled people] for so long because that’s in our head. It’s there all the time kind of beating us as if we’re Black.... Keep away from the rest of us”.

Individual Level Factors



- **Low level of Educational qualifications**
 - Health Education is not sufficient to change dietary habits
- **Low level of Control over Food choices**

- **Try to avoid Stress & Food Waste**

“It’s simpler for her to eat whatever the children are eating or he is eating, you know. It’s easier just to go along with things”.

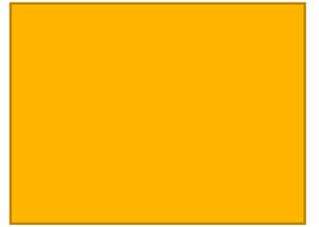
“so you go for convenience all the time, you have to for the sake of sanity”

Individual Level Factors

- **Lack of Energy / Time to manage change in diet / physical activity**
 - Due to care-giving demands
- **Laziness / nowadays always in cars**
- **Short-term Motivation**
 - Linked to upcoming social / family occasions
- **Lack of / Undermining of Motivation**
 - Almost impossible to socialise due to racial discrimination
 - Traditional Traveller social events being undermined / abandoned

“The joy of life is gone you know. There’s no social life. There’s no way that you can go out. There’s no point in looking well because you’re not gonna get in anyway”.

Environmental Factors



- **Food Cost & Food Waste**

- Healthy Food is expensive – budget may be low

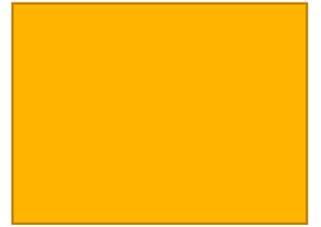
“It comes down to brass tacks doesn’t it. You’re going to buy whatever you can afford so you’re probably going to get the cheaper food”.

- There’s a reluctance to try new foods due to risk of waste

- **Obesogenic environment**

- Greatly increased access to convenience food at low cost

International Evidence Base : Physiological Factors affecting Weight

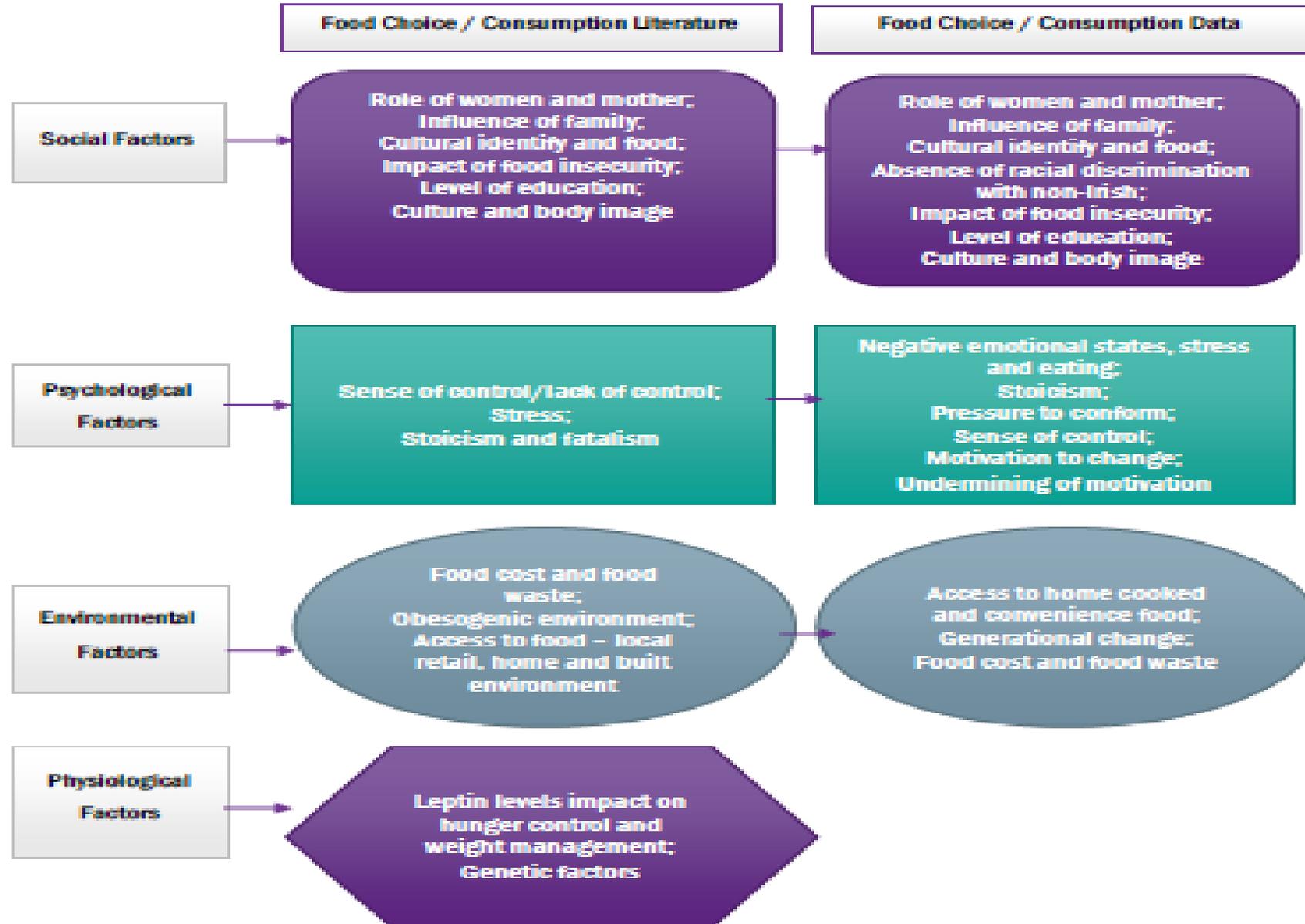


- **Growing scientific understanding of overweight & obesity**
 - Chronic stress known to interfere with normal hormonal balance, appetite & weight gain
 - Pregnancies & maternal stress both associated with weight gain
- **Growing scientific understanding of physiological challenges of weight loss** for people who are significantly overweight or obese

International Evidence Base : Physiological Factors affecting Weight

- **Current Evidence on the 'Food Insecurity – Obesity Paradox'**
 - Women who have experienced food insecurity are more likely to be overweight or obese
 - Evidence of *greater impact on women with children*, than men or women without children
 - Theorised that childhood food insecurity is possibly magnified in adulthood
 - Those on low-incomes more likely to buy low-cost, energy- dense foods to ensure energy needs met

Strong Similarities between International Research on Food Choice & Study Findings



Strong Similarities with Women in other Ethnic Minorities and/or Living in Poverty

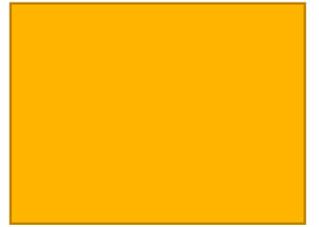


Must acknowledge the impact of –

**Ethnic minority status
Gender
& Social Position**

on Traveller Women's lives and health

Improving Traveller Women's Health – How?



“Healthy eating would be a luxury now to be worrying about compared to the other stuff that be going on”.



A Social Determinants of Health approach focussing on Structural Determinants & based on strong Traveller Community involvement is required to improve Traveller women's health status

Implications of Study Findings and International Evidence for Health Promotion Practice



- Programme managers, planners & practitioners:
 - Recognise the necessity of a Social Determinants of Health approach to working with Traveller women – tackling structural determinants & working outside disciplinary silos
 - Should take account of the personal & community experiences / stresses / cultural constraints which Traveller women experience & not add to the challenges they face
 - Should be knowledgeable about & incorporate international evidence when planning health education / promotion initiatives & focus on improving well-being
 - Should be willing to present counter-arguments / evidence against programmes with an exclusively lifestyle / behaviour change focus

Inter-agency Partnership Actions

- **October 2016:**
 - **'Report of the Traveller Women's Food Choice, Physical Activity and Health Study' – available on UCC website**
- **2017 / 2018 actions:**
 - **Disseminate findings & work towards creating new discourse & practice based on the SDoH of Traveller Women**
 - **Workshops with STHN members, Traveller Primary Health Workers & other Traveller organisations**
 - **Video to illustrate the SDoH of Traveller women – on Youtube**
 - **Presentations to HSE staff & management across 3 regions**
 - **Academic dissemination – UCC & NUIG seminars / conferences**
 - **Presentation to National Traveller Health committees**
 - **Goal – to present to Healthy Ireland senior management**



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Video on Social Determinants of Health for Traveller Women

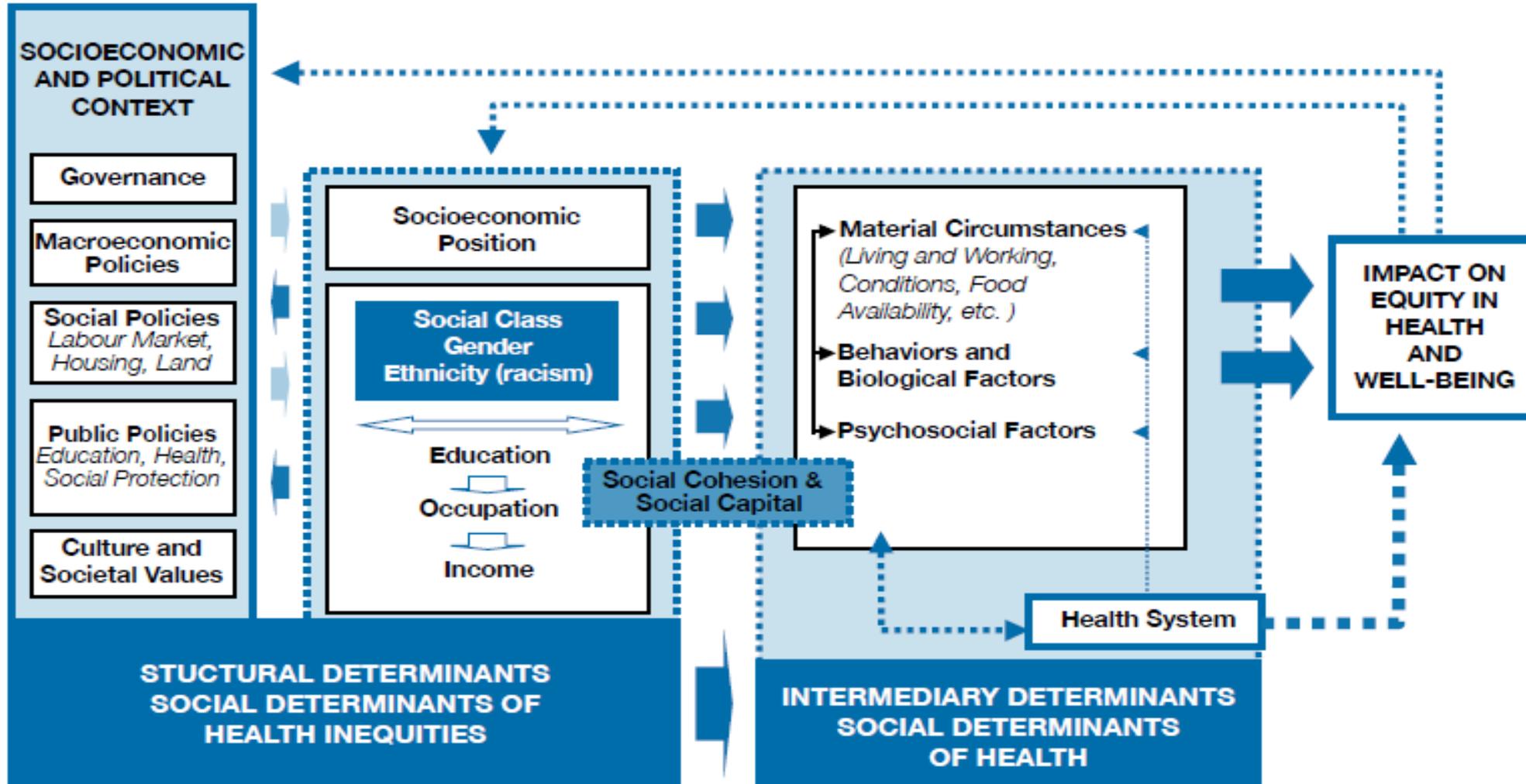


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaMMh8N_Jww

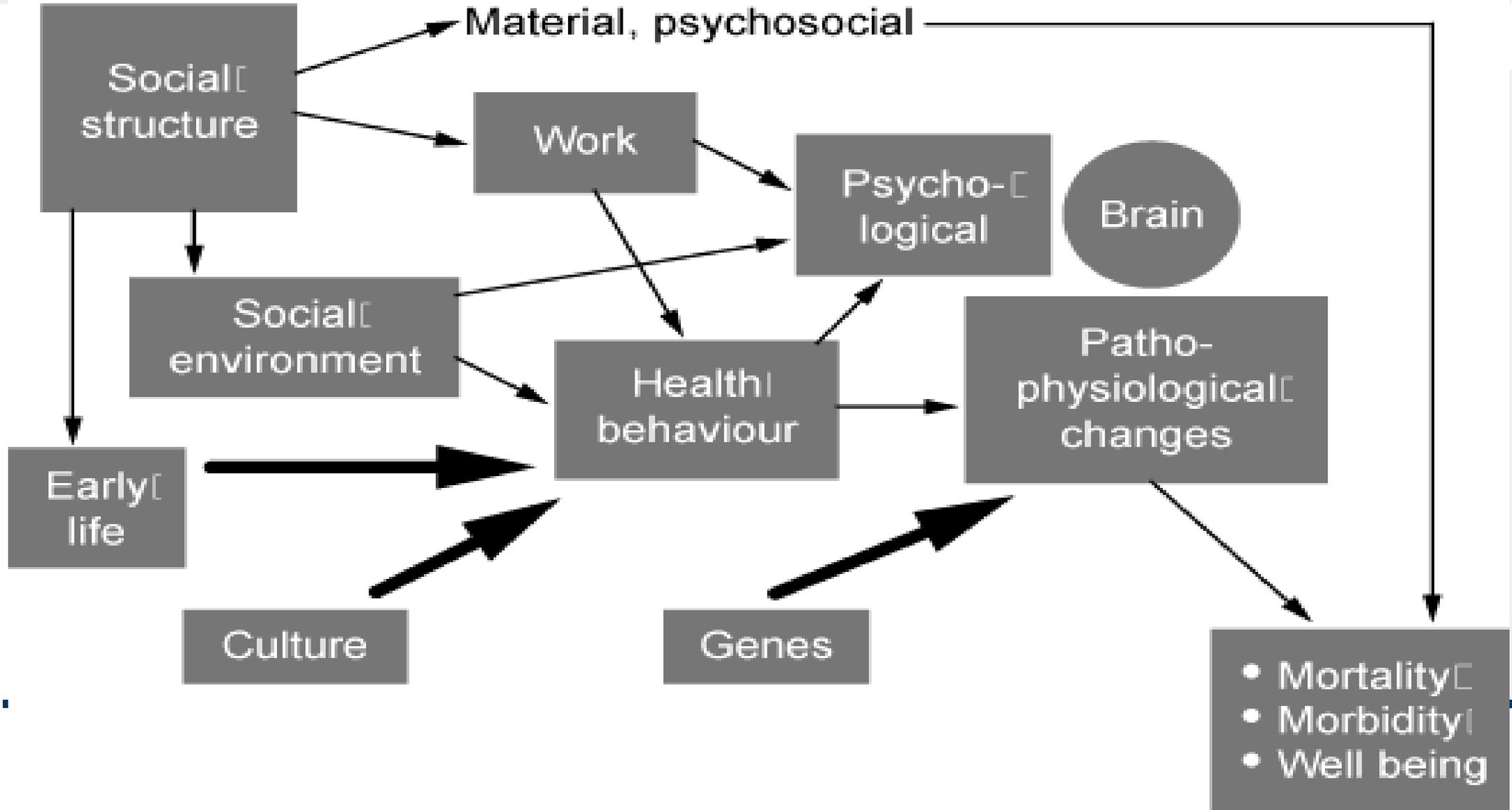
WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health Conceptual Framework



Figure A. Final form of the CSDH conceptual framework



Social Determinants of Health Model, Acheson Report, 1998



Life Course Perspective on Food Choice

(Delaney & McCarthy 2011)



Figure 2 Key life course influences on present food choice patterns

