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**Environmental Health Disparities: A Framework Integrating
Psychosocial and Environmental Concepts**

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Abbreviations: EDP = exposure disease paradigm

Outline of section headers:

Abstract

Introduction

Health Disparities and the Environment

The Stress-Exposure Disease Framework

 The Exposure Disease Paradigm

 Race and Residential Location

 Environmental Burdens: Environmental Justice

 Structural Factors

 Community Stressors

 Health effects of stress

 Types of community stressors

 Racial disparities in exposure to stressors

 Neighborhood Resources

 Community stress

Future Directions

Conclusion

Abstract:

Although it is often acknowledged that social and environmental factors interact to produce racial and ethnic environmental health disparities, it is still unclear how this occurs. Despite continued controversy, the environmental justice movement has provided some insight by suggesting that disadvantaged communities face greater likelihood of exposure to ambient hazards. The exposure disease paradigm has long suggested that differential “vulnerability” may modify the effects of toxins on biological systems. However, relatively little work has been done to specify whether racial and ethnic minorities may have greater vulnerability than majority populations, and further, what these vulnerabilities may be. We suggest that psychosocial stress may be the vulnerability factor that links social conditions with environmental hazards.

Psychosocial stress can lead to acute and chronic changes in the functioning of body systems (e.g. immune) and also lead directly to illness.

We present a multidisciplinary framework integrating these ideas. We argue that residential segregation leads to differential experiences of community stress, exposure to pollutants, and access to community resources. When not counterbalanced by resources, stressors may lead to heightened vulnerability to environmental hazards.