The case study of recently widowed Elena has a lot more underlying social determinants then one would scrape off the top of this case. The amount of grief one faces varies and effects each person differently. According to Physician Jesús A. Garceía (2012), bereavement can cause an “increased risk in depression, generalized anxiety and panic disorder, alcohol abuse” (p288), and there are many more. There’s a lot more too this case than just that. Elena is fifty-year-old women who loves to bake. She complains about pain after only standing for a few hours. She makes enough money for her basic needs but rely heavily on her grandchildren to help make ends meet. On top of that, she is also forty pounds’ overweight. The way the case is told, it doesn't give an exact race or ethnicity for Elena, but it does state that she likes to keep half a dozen cupcakes with her instead of her grandchildren taking them, which leads to the belief that her culture is one that is very generous and when food is prepared, there is more than extra food. There are only so many of these cultures, including the Latino and Italian culture. Because of this information given on Elena, it is not to challenging finding social determinants for her. The three most obvious ones were her hobbies, her culture and her income.

The case starts off stating that Elena loves to bake. Baking to Elena has both positive and negatives effects on her clinical determination. This hobby of hers not only affects her physical health but also causes chronic diseases. According to Professor Eaton (2017), recent evidence shows that today’s culture and way of life is a very sedimentary lifestyle, not very active, combined with an unhealthy eating regimen, this becomes “metabolically toxic” (p1). This kind of lifestyle is seen right away in the case when it states that she is “40 pounds’ overweight”, eats 6 cupcakes when she wakes up, and how she’s already in pain after only standing for a few hours. “Obesity results from complex interactions between individual decisions and the environment in which those decisions are made” (p 9, 2015), was stated by Jeff Niederdeppe, meaning that the circumstance that Elena is facing has influenced her to the life of being overweight. Her obesity, lack of nutrition, and sedimentary lifestyle are the causes for her body pain, dizziness, and chronic diseases. Her hobby of baking isn’t all negative though. Baking helps fill Elena’s void and emptiness after losing her husband. It helps keep her mind busy and gives her common grounds with her grandchildren, doing something that they both enjoy.
The largest, but most underlying social determinant is culture. According to Terry L. Cross (2003), “culture [should be] thought of as a resource for meeting basic human needs” (p356), which is seen in this case after dissecting the text and looking past the surface by observing how Elena and her family interact together. Because Elena has grandchildren, they have been there for her to help her move past her grieving. This idea of the family coming, and helping take care of the elders is a newer, cultural concept, while more ancient and older ones have the “elders raise their families and pick up the pieces for grandchildren who lost their [families].” (p45, 2014). This large family atmosphere and culture leads to the thought that this culture promotes having a large family, and what brings the family together after a long day: lots of food. With that culture though comes complications, and for Elena’s case, chronic diseases and poor physical health. The culture Elena comes from, according to Rachel Young, has given her the “behavioral factors to cause [chronic] disease or conditions” (p 903), meaning that the way she’s handling the grieving has some correlation to her cultural background.

Lastly, having a huge impact on Elena’s overall health is her income and socioeconomic status. Since she has recently lost her husband who provided for her, she now has barely enough to survive and her grandchildren have to help pay for her groceries. As seen by a study conducted by Paula Braveman (2013), in 1988 through 1998, and the graph shows how people in lower economic status are 32% more likely to develop chronic diseases then those who are in a higher socio-economic class (p24). The reason for this is, is that people who come from a higher socio-economic class, usually tend to have a better education, resulting in being educated on how to live a healthier lifestyle. This is proven by Ambepitiyawaduge Pubudu De Silva in his journal he published in 2015. His research takes into consideration; “ethnicity, sector, education level, occupational category, and income category” (p4). His results conclude that people in lower economic classes, tend to be obese and deal with more chronic diseases. This is backed also by an experiment conducted by Carolina A. Jackson’s study (2015). The results from her experiment show that women who come from low income areas or families are at a higher chance to develop some sort of chronic disease than those women coming from a higher financial stability background (p10). Not being financially stable wont only affect her physical health and put Elena at a higher risk for chronic disease but will also affect her mental health. Because of living from check to check, Elena has the stress of not being financially stable, and not having the luxury to enjoy other material things or have the money to just try something new.

The effect of losing a loved one, especially the one who is the provider has so many more
effects than we see at the surface. From chronic diseases, to mental and physical health, and even behaviors change from it, without that person even noticing are all side effects of a tragic death. Having a support system to help one move through the grievance is an excellent way to help move on but that support system didn't come out of nowhere. With the family values and cultures instilled from a young age, Elena not only had a support system there to help her, but hopefully on her way to recovery, her family helps her recognizes the changes this tragic death brought to her life and help minimize the damage she does to herself and her health.

Red arrows indicate a negative effect; Green arrows indicate a positive effect.
References


