

SOCI 309 Health and Illness
Topic: Social inequalities in health
Winter 2014

The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being
~ Constitution of the World Health Organization

General Information

Course number and title, number of credits

SOCI 309 Health and Illness, 3 credits

Meeting times and location for lectures

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:35-3:55PM, RPHYS118;

Professor

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Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3-4PM

Communication policy

We will make every attempt to answer email in a timely fashion within 36 hours of receipt. Please see the professor or TA during class office hours for urgent issues.

“If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 before you do this.”

Course content

Why is the elimination of social inequalities in health a top policy priority? How are these inequalities generated and what can/should we do about them?

Throughout this semester, we will tackle these and other difficult questions, through an in-depth look into the field of research on social inequalities in health.

As such, this course is not just an introduction to the field of medical sociology (see SOCI 225 for one such excellent course), but rather an advanced undergraduate course that will challenge you to critically evaluate evidence in this field of research to develop your own opinion regarding social inequalities in health.

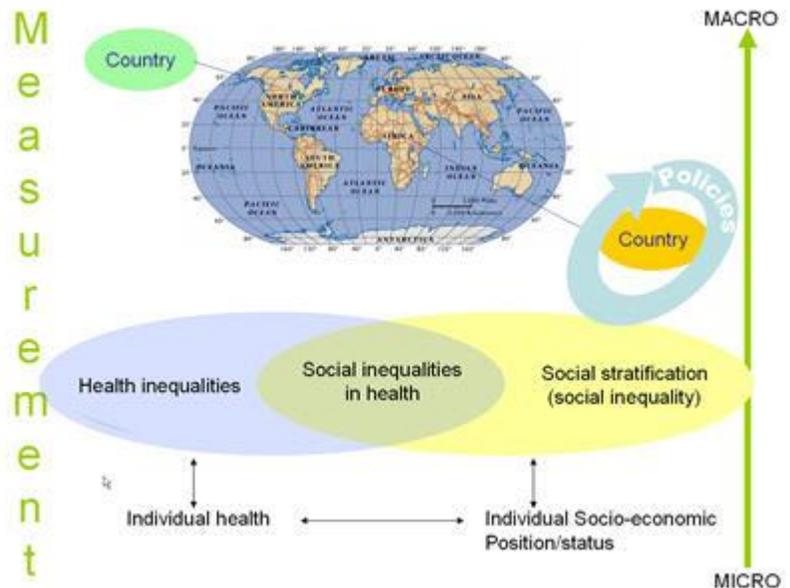
This course has no prerequisites, and is thus aimed at advanced undergraduates from sociology, but also from political science, biology, economics, psychology and all those generally interested in the health and illness of human populations.

Please see Figure 1 for an illustration of the concepts we will cover in this course, and the interrelation between them. Reading this figure from the bottom up, we will follow the scale on the right-hand side to start at the individual (micro) level with definitions of health and socioeconomic status, to then show how these individual differences come to be translated into health inequalities on the one hand and social stratification, or social inequality, on the other hand.

That level of analysis will highlight the fact that in any society with biologically-relevant variations in its population – in age for instance – will exhibit health inequalities. Similarly, all human societies have experienced varying levels of social stratification. Social inequalities in health arise out of the intersection of those two spheres, namely when health inequalities are no longer just biologically or randomly patterned, but follow a social hierarchy.

Finally, at the global (macro) level, we will see how different countries vary in their level of social inequalities in health, and the role that public policies do or can play in this relationship. The word “measurement” is highlighted on the left-hand side of the figure because it raises crucial issues at all those levels of analysis.

Figure 1. Concept Map for the course



Learning outcomes

This course will enable participants to:

- Describe how research progressed from an individualistic model of disease causation to the consideration of social factors.
- List the different ways in which socioeconomic position and health can be measured, and discuss their respective merits.
- Explain what social inequalities in health are and where they stem from.
- Contrast definitions of inequality and inequity and use examples to illustrate differences.
- Distinguish between relative and absolute inequality.
- Compare the interrelations between health and social status at the individual level, and social inequalities in health at the macro (societal and global) levels.
- Discriminate between inequalities in health that cannot be modified and social inequalities in health that are avoidable.
- Analyze and criticize debates about policies in their potential impact on health inequalities.
- Develop an informed opinion and be ready to support it in debates on topics such as:
 - o Should we invest in education and/or the health care system to reduce social inequalities in health?
 - o What are governments' responsibilities regarding social inequalities in health?
 - o What should be the role of private insurance in the Canadian health care system?

Course requirements

You are expected to read the assigned material before class and be prepared to discuss it. See details of seminars for the schedule of reading for book chapters and articles.

Articles (required): All assigned readings are available electronically (see the hyperlinks in this syllabus or texts on MyCourses).

Weekly outline of lectures and required readings

Part I. Setting up the problem: History, concepts and methods

January 7 and 9

Overview of the course: what are social inequalities in health, and why study them?

Expectations for the semester.

“In Sickness and in Wealth”. Episode 1 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. [Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts](#) by Juha Mikkonen and Dennis Raphael.

January 14 and 16

What is health? From individualistic models of disease causation to population health.

1. Quesnel–Vallée, A. 2007. “[Self-rated health: caught in the crossfire of the quest for ‘true’ health?](#)” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 36: 1161 - 1164.
2. Rose, G. 2001. “[Sick individuals and sick populations.](#)” *International Journal of Epidemiology*. 30:427-432.
3. Frohlich, K. and Potvin, L. 2008. “[Transcending the Known in Public Health Practice: The Inequality Paradox: The Population Approach and Vulnerable Populations.](#)” *Am J Public Health* 98:216-221.
4. Institute of Medicine. 2002. [Understanding Population Health and Its Determinants.](#) *The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century*.pp.46-67 (to obtain the pdf for free, click on “download” to the left, and then register to NAP).

January 21 and 23

Social determinants: Concepts and measurements

1. Lynch, J. and Kaplan, G. 2000. “Socioeconomic position”. Chapter 2, pp. 37-59. In Lisa F. Berkman and Ichiro Kawachi (Eds) *Social Epidemiology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Jenks, C. 2002. “[Does inequality matter?](#)” *Daedalus* 131:49–65.
3. OECD. 2011. [Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising](#) (4-pager summary)
4. Stiglitz, J.E. “[Inequality Is Holding Back the Recovery](#)” *New York Times*, January 19, 2013, 6:47 pm.
5. Parkinson, D. “[Economy Lab Roundup: Why has the One Per Cent’s tax share shrunk?](#)” *The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 17 2013, 5:00 AM EST

FIRST MYCOURSES RESPONSE DUE BY MIDNIGHT ON SUNDAY JANUARY 26

January 28 and 30

Social determinants and health inequalities: History, concepts and measurement

1. Raphael, D. 2009. “Social Determinants of Health: An overview of key issues and themes”. Chapter 1, pp.2-20, In Raphael, D. (Ed.) *Social Determinants of Health*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.

2. Kawachi, I, S V Subramanian, and N Almeida-Filho. 2002. "[A Glossary for Health Inequalities.](#)" *J Epidemiol Community Health* 56(9):647-52.
3. Whitehead, M. 1991. "[The concepts and principles of equity and health.](#)" *Health Promot. Int.*: 217-220.
4. Bartley, M. 2004. "Figuring out health inequality" Pp. 35-63 in *Health inequality: An introduction to theories, concepts and methods*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

February 4 and 6

How the social gets "under the skin". Special guest lecture from Prof. Aniruddha Das, Sociology.

1. Krieger, N. 2005. "[Embodiment: A Conceptual Glossary for Epidemiology.](#)" *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59, no. 5: 350–355..
2. Hertzman C. 2012. [Putting the concept of biological embedding in historical perspective.](#) *PNAS* 2012 109 (Supplement 2), 17160-17167
3. McEwen B. 2012. [Brain on stress: How the social environment gets under the skin.](#) *PNAS* 2012 109 (Supplement 2), 17180-17185
4. Adler, N., N. R. Bush, and M. S. Pantell. 2012. "[Rigor, Vigor, and the Study of Health Disparities.](#)" *PNAS* 109, no. (Supplement_2) 17154–17159

Part II. An in-depth look at some of the social determinants of health

February 11 and 13

February 13: BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (on MyCourses and hand-in paper copy in person during class)

The life course approach: No matter how hard you try, you can't get away from your past.

"When the bough breaks". Episode 2 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. Ben-Shlomo, Y. and D. Kuh. 2002. "[A Life Course Approach to Chronic Disease Epidemiology: Conceptual Models, Empirical Challenges and Interdisciplinary Perspectives.](#)" *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31:285-93.
2. Bartley, M., David Blane, and Scott Montgomery. 1997. "[Socioeconomic determinants of health: Health and the life course: why safety nets matter.](#)" *British Medical Journal* 314:1194-1196.

February 18 and 20

Behavioral and cultural explanations, or how victims came to be blamed.

"Bad sugar". Episode 4 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. Eckersley, R. 2007. "[Culture.](#)" Pp. 193-209 in *Macrosocial Determinants of Population Health*. Edited by S. Galea: Springer.
2. Link, B. and Phelan J. 2009. "[The social shaping of health and smoking.](#)" *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 104:S6-S10. p. S8 S9
3. [Could A Soda Tax Prevent 2,600 Deaths Per Year?](#) by Allison Aubrey, January 12, 2012 5:08 PM
4. [Extreme Negative Anti-Smoking Ads Can Backfire, Experts Find](#)

February 25 and 27

February 27: Midterm in class (on the material covered up to February 20, inclusively)

Psycho-social model: "If men define situations as *real*, they are *real* in their consequences" (Thomas 1928).

"Not just a paycheck". Episode 7 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. Mustard C., Lavis J., and Ostry A. 2006. "[Work and health: New evidence and Enhanced Understandings.](#)" Pp. 173-201 in *Healthier Societies: From Analysis to Action*. Edited by J. Heymann, C. Hertzman, M. L. Barer, and R. G. Evans: Oxford University Press USA.
2. House, J. 2002. [Understanding social factors and inequalities in health: 20th century progress and 21st Century Prospects.](#) *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*; 43, 2: 125-142.

March 3-7: Reading week**March 11 and 13**

Social Networks: It's not just what you know, it's who you know

"Becoming American". Episode 3 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. Berry, J. 1997. "[Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation](#)" *Applied Psychology; An International Review* 46:5-34.
2. Christakis N.A. and Fowler J. 2007 . "[The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network Over 32 Years](#)," *New England Journal of Medicine* 357(4): 370-379.
3. Berkman L., Ertel K., Glymour M. 2011. [Chapter 24 - Aging and Social Intervention: Life Course Perspectives](#). *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (Seventh Edition), , Pages 337-351.

March 18 and 20

Health and place: Income inequality and other contextual factors

"Place matters". Episode 5 of the *Unnatural Causes* DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

1. Van Hulst, A., Gauvin L., Kestens Y., and Barnett T. 2005. "[Neighborhood Built and Social Environment Characteristics: A Multilevel Analysis of Associations with Obesity among Children and Their Parents](#)." *International Journal of Obesity* 37, no. 10: 1328–1335.
2. Pickett K. and Wilkinson R. 2007. "[Child wellbeing and income inequality in rich societies: ecological cross sectional study](#)" *British Medical Journal*. 24 November 2007; 335(7629): 1080-1086.
3. Ross, N., Wolfson M., Dunn J., Berthelot J., Kaplan G., and Lynch J. 2000. "[Relation between Income Inequality and Mortality in Canada and in the United States: Cross Sectional Assessment Using Census Data and Vital Statistics](#)." *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)* 320, no. 7239: 898–902

March 25 and 27

The materialist model: Could it be all about money?

1. Lynch, J., Smith G., Kaplan G., and House J. 2000. "[Income Inequality and Mortality: Importance to Health of Individual Income, Psychosocial Environment, or Material Conditions](#)." *British Medical Journal* 320 (7243):1200-1204.
2. Angel R. and Lein L. 2006. "[Living on a Poverty Income: The Role of Non-Governmental Agencies in the Scramble for Resources](#)." *Washington University Journal of Law and Policy* 20:75-99.

Part III. What can we do about it? Thinking about policy

April 1 and 3

A primer on the Canadian health system and private health insurance

1. Quesnel-Vallée, A. 2008. "Health Insurance and Social Inequalities in Health. " in *Encyclopedia of the Life Course and Human Development*, vol. 2 Adulthood, edited by R. C. Deborah Carr, Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Hughes, Amy Pienta (Eds). Thomson Gale : Farmington Hills, Michigan.
2. Roos, N., Brownell M, and Menec V. 2006. "[Universal Medical Care and Health Inequalities: Right Objectives, Insufficient Tools](#)." Pp. 107-131 in *Healthier Societies: From Analysis to Action*, edited by C. H. J. Heymann, M. L. Barer, and R. G. Evans: Oxford University Press USA.
3. Madore O. 2006. "[Duplicate Private Health Care Insurance: Potential implications for Quebec and Canada](#)." Ottawa: Library of Parliament. PRB 05-71E (15 pages).
4. Blackwell T.. [Canadian doctors warn fee cuts, pay inequalities will spur exodus](#). National Post, May 12, 2012 1:09 PM ET

April 8 and 10

Policy: So what can we do about it all?

1. Quesnel-Vallée, A. and T. Jenkins. 2010. "Social Policies and Health Inequalities. The Blackwell New Companion to Medical Sociology." Pp. 455-483 in *The New Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology*. Edited by William Cockerham.
2. IRPP 2013. [Nudge. Experiments in human nature](#). *Policy Options/Options Politiques*, vol 34, no. 5.
3. Shonkoff, J. P. 2012. "[Leveraging the Biology of Adversity to Address the Roots of Disparities in Health and Development](#)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109, no. Supplement_2: 17302–17307..
4. Stiglitz, J.E. [Inequality Is a Choice](#). *New York Times*, October 13, 2013, 9:06 pm

April 10: ESSAY DUE (MyCourses and hand-in paper copy in person during class)

TBD APRIL 14-29: FINAL CUMULATIVE EXAM (see official exam schedule for location).

Assignments and evaluation

At a glance

	Due date	Total % of course grade
Participation		
Weekly postings on MyCourses	First post due by 11:59PM, Sunday January 26 and then every week, before midnight on Sunday	10% 5%
Participation in class activities	Class activities (debates, discussion) throughout the semester	5%
Exams		
Midterm	February 27 (on material covered up to February 20)	50% 20%
Final (cumulative)	See official final exam schedule	30%
Research Essay		
Bibliography	February 13	40% 5%
Essay	April 10	35%

Policy on late assignments

We do not accept late MyCourses postings, and the board closes at 11:59PM exactly. We will not accept emails with your postings, no matter what the excuse is (i.e. slow computer, network slowdown, etc). You are responsible for starting the post ahead of time to ensure that you do not run against technological failure. The only exception to this rule is if McGill IT has a documented system failure with MyCourses.

Out of fairness for fellow classmates, all other **assignments are considered to be late if handed in outside of the designated class periods**. You must hand in both a paper and an electronic version.

Late assignments will incur a penalty of 20% of the assignment's grade. Each additional 24-hour delay (including over the week-end) will incur another 20%. In other words, an assignment handed in 5 days late will be worth 0%. Please email your late assignments through MyCourses to both professor and TA as soon as you can.

Participation

This consists of weekly posting of questions, thoughts, comments, debates bearing either on the previous week's lecture or the upcoming week's readings. These questions are to be posted on a designated forum in MyCourses, by **Sunday 11:59PM**, every week starting after drop-add. Please note that the forum will close at **11:59PM** sharp and that you will no longer be able to post after that time.

This assignment is meant to ensure that you come to class prepared, and that you have thought about the readings enough to have questions about them. We will use the questions you post to adjust the lectures to focus on issues that were more difficult to understand. Some of these questions may be used in exams as well. Post early and take a look at your colleagues' questions, because **a question repeating a previous one will not earn you any points**. We also encourage you to try and answer your colleagues' questions. The instructor and TA will monitor the boards to ensure accuracy of responses and courtesy.

In class participation will be assessed by your attendance to debates or discussion sessions.

Examinations

Exams will consist of matching, and short answers questions. The final exam is cumulative.

As per the University regulations concerning final exams, "Instructors are not permitted to grant any special treatment regarding examinations to any student.

Students who believe there are circumstances which might justify making special examination arrangements for them or which might legitimately be taken into account in evaluating their performance should apply to the Associate Dean of their faculty."

It is the responsibility of the student to confirm the date, time and place of the examination by checking examination schedules posted on notice boards on campus or on this web site:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/student-records/exam/schedules/>.

Students are advised not to make travel plans prior to the release of the Final Exam Schedule.

Vacation plans do not constitute grounds for the deferral or re-scheduling of final exams.

Research Essay:

This assignment requires that you turn in a bibliography. Please see week-by-week detailed schedule or *At a glance* table above for dates.

More detailed instructions (length, etc) on these assignments will be discussed in class after drop-add, and posted on MyCourses, along with the evaluation criteria guidelines.

Students' rights and responsibilities

Attendance and participation in class discussions.

You are responsible for all announcements made in class and on MyCourses, as well as for all course materials given out in class. You should also check for new announcements or material on MyCourses at least weekly.

Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities

“If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 before you do this.”

Remise des travaux en français

Les étudiants de ce cours peuvent rédiger tous leurs travaux (incluant les examens) en français, mais doivent pour ce faire obtenir la **permission préalable** de la professeure. **Aucune permission rétroactive ne sera accordée.**

Review of a mark

You have the right to ask for a regrading if you feel that your work was not accurately graded. However, in order to request a regrade, **you must write a one page paper indicating the reasons why your work should be regraded** and hand it in to the professor **within a week of receiving the grade.**

In addition, during the regrading process, the work is analyzed much more critically. The first time around, we tend to give students the benefit of the doubt. **Please also note that we will regrade the whole material (not just an individual question), and that we have the right to lower your grade in this process.**

You may prefer to meet with us and talk about how you may have improved your work and your learning.

Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days

“1 Students are not to be penalized if they cannot write examinations or be otherwise evaluated on their religious holy days where such activities conflict with their religious observances. (...)

2 Students who because of religious commitment cannot meet academic obligations, other than final examinations, on certain holy days are **responsible for informing their instructor, with two weeks' notice of each conflict.** (...)

3 When the requested accommodation concerns a **final examination, students are responsible for advising their faculty office as soon as possible and not later than the deadline for reporting conflicts.** Additional documentation confirming their religious affiliation may be requested.” (Approved by Senate - November 20, 1996 - Minute 92)

Statement on academic integrity at McGill

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).”

“L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).”