

SOCI 309 Health and Illness
Topic: Social inequalities in health
Fall 2020

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

PLAN FOR REMOTE DELIVERY FALL 2020

Finally, you will also engage in a semester-long project that will allow you to learn, relate with one another's research interests and integrate what you learned to share it with others. Through a sequence of related assessments building on each other, you will develop a research poster that you will evaluate through a peer-to-peer process and refine in response to the feedback received.



Instructor

Dr. Amélie Quesnel-Vallée, Canada Research Chair in Policies and Health Inequalities, Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health.

Office hours: By sign up on <https://calendly.com/amelie-quesnelvallee/soci309officehours>

Teaching assistants

If your last name begins with the letters A-K: Kaitlin Conway

If your last name begins with the letters K-Z: Sami MacKenzie

Communication policy

Email should be used only as a last resort. We have set up multiple means of communication – please use them first! With 160 of you in the class, you will really help us help you to the best of our ability by abiding by these guidelines: it may not seem like much from your standpoint, but if each of you writes only one puny little email per week that takes even just 5 minutes to read and reply to, that will culminate in a workload of 800 minutes, or 13 hours for us to answer each and every one of you. However, we know from experience that if one of you has a question, there are likely to be others in the same situation, so we wish by tackling this all together.

1. Discussion boards

We have set up discussion boards on Canvas to crowdsource the most asked questions and answers, organized by general topics.

Please consult those first if you have a question. IF your question has already been asked, please post your question there and we will answer within 48 hours. We encourage you to answer other students' questions if you know the answer (we will monitor Q&A for accuracy and courtesy).

2. Office hours

For questions that require confidentiality, we have set up office hours through Calendly, with varied time slots on multiple days of the week to accommodate multiple time zones.

Office hours with Professor Quesnel-Vallée <https://calendly.com/amelie-quesnelvallee/soci309officehours>

Office hours with Kaitlin Conway:

Office hours with Sami MacKenzie:

"As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009."

"In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change."

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 reviewed in this course, and the interrelation between

- 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 and their potential impact on health inequalities.
- Develop an informed opinion and be ready to support it in debates on topics such as:
 - What should be the role of private insurance in the Canadian health care system?
 - Should we invest in education and/or the health care system to reduce social inequalities in health?
 - What are governments' responsibilities regarding social inequalities in health?

Course requirements

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

Required readings

- Davidson, A. 2019.

Weekly outline of lectures and required readings

Please note that the specific schedule and readings may change during the semester, as per class announcements and updates to the course outline provided on Canvas. You are responsible for keeping up to date on that information at least weekly.

Week of Aug 31. Getting to know each other.

Sept. 3: Synchronous zoom session

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

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

Week of Sept. 7. What is health, and how do we measure it?

Readings

1. Davidson. Introduction.
2. Quesnel–Vallée, A. 2007. [Self-rated health: caught in the cross of the quest for 'true' health?](#) International Journal of Epidemiology 36: 1161 - 1164.

Sept. 10: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 14. What is inequality, and how do we measure it?

Reminders: Add/Drop deadline. First discussion posts due by Wednesday September 16 at midnight.

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

"In Sickness and in Wealth". Episode 1 of [The Natural Causes](#) DVD. Click [here](#) for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:

1. Dominic Frisby. 2018. [Wealth inequality is soaring – here are the 10 reasons why it's happening](#) The Guardian.
2. OECD. 2011. [Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising](#) (4-page summary, opens best in Explorer)
3. Stiglitz, J.E. [Inequality Is Holding Back the Recovery](#) New York Times, January 19, 2013, 6:47 pm.

Sept. 17: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 21. What is inequality, and how do we measure it?

Reminders: First quiz on Tuesday September 22.

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

Cholera and coronavirus: why we must not repeat the same mistakes. The Guardian's Audio Long Read.

To listen: <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/guardianuk/guardian-audio-edition/e/70262318?ref=asa&autoplay=true>

To read: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/01/cholera-and-coronavirus-why-we-must-not-repeat-the-same-mistakes>

Readings :

Population health: from John Snow to the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health

1. Davidson. Chapter 1.

Sept. 24: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 28 From individualistic models of disease causation to population health

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

Dr Laurie Santos. The Happiness Lab. Episode 7: How to Kick Bad Habits (and Start Good Ones)

<https://www.happinesslab.fm/season-2-episodes/ep7-how-to-kick-bad-habits-and-start-good-ones>

Readings:

1. Davidson. Chapter 3.
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. Kawachi, I, S V Subramanian, and N Almeida-Filho. 2002. [Glossary for Health Inequalities](#) Epidemiol Community Health 56(9):647-52.

Sept. 31: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Oct. 5. How the social gets “under the skin” and thinking about causation

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

Quesnel-Vallée, A. Physical distancing is a privilege Canadian Association of Health Services and Policy Research Virtually CAHSPR session, May 28, 2020.

Start watching at 28:30 (though I recommend other presentations as well if you have time!)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drASWeO5spU&feature=emb_logo

Readings:

1. Brunner, E. and M. Marmot. 2000. Social organization, stress and health. Ch. 2, pp. 17-43. Marmot, M. and R.G. Wilkinson, Eds. Social Determinants of Health. New York: Oxford University Press. (on myCourses.)
2. Hertzman C. 2012. [Putting the concept of biological embedding in historical perspective](#) PNAS 2012 109 (Supplement 2) 17160-17167
3. 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

Oct. 8: Synchronous zoom session

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

Week of Oct. 12. Behavioral and cultural explanations, or how victims came to be blamed

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

“Bad sugar”. Episode 4 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. [Click](#) for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:

1. Davidson. Chapter 11.
2. Davidson. Chapter 13.
3. Link, B. and Phelan J. 2009. [The social shaping of health and smoking](#). *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 104:S6-S10. p. S8 S9
4. [Could A Soda Tax Prevent 2,600 Deaths Per Year?](#) by Allison Aubrey, January 12, 2012 5:08 PM
5. [Extreme Negative Anti-Smoking Ad Can Backfire, Experts Find](#)

Oct. 15: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Oct. 19. The life course approach: No matter how hard you try, you can't get away from your past.

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

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

Readings:

1. Davidson. Chapter 5.
2. 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.
3. Bartley, M., David Blane, and Scott Montgomery. 1997. [Socioeconomic determinants of health: Health and the life course: my safety nets matter.](#)

2. Berry, J. 1997. [Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation](#). *Applied Psychology; An International Review* 46:5-34.
3. 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.

Nov 5: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 9. Health and place: Income inequality and other contextual factors

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

"Place matters". Episode 5 of the [unnatural Causes DVD](#). Click [Nov cone0 g 17.08.72D .0003 Tc -.0007 T \(46:5f](#)

2. Quesnel-Vallée, A. and T. Jenkins. 2009. "Social Policies and Health Inequalities. The Blackwell New Companion to Medical Sociology." Pp. 455-483. The New Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology Edited by William Cockerham (on MyCourses)
3. Soman, D. [Making policy through a behavioural lens](#). Policy Options/Options Politiques vol 34, no. 5 (Nudge. Experiments in human nature).
4. Stiglitz, J.E. [Inequality Is a Choice](#). New York Times, October 13, 2013, 9:06 pm

Nov 26: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 31. Wrapping up.

Reminders: POSTER DUE

Dec 1 (Synchronous session) Ask me anything session!

If you're wondering how I became interested in this area of research, what was my path to becoming a professor, what are the careers one can pursue in this research, what it's like to be a professor and to do research that engages with decision makers... I'll be there and field your questions in a synchronous meeting session, the more the merrier!

Assignments and evaluation

At a glance

	Due date	Total % of course grade
Discussion board	Weekly posts (1 point each) from September 16 to November 25 (10 highest grades over the 11 weeks)	10%
Reading interaction	Weekly posts (1 point each) from September 16 to November 25 (10 highest grades over the 11 weeks)	10%
Weekly quizzes	Weekly (5 points ea) from September 22 to November 24 (8 highest grades over 10 weeks) – on Tuesdays	40%
Research poster		40%
Annotated Bibliography	Oct 2 before midnight ET	10%
Draft poster	Oct. 23 before midnight ET	5%
Peer feedback	Nov. 6 before midnight ET	5%
Response to feedback	Nov. 20 before midnight ET	5%
Final poster	Dec. 1 before midnight ET	15%

Policy on late assignments

We will not accept emails with your assignments, no matter what the excuse (i.e. slow computer, network slowdown, etc). You are responsible for starting the assignment ahead of time to ensure that you do not run against technological failure. The only exception to this is if McGill IT has a documented system failure. Out of fairness for fellow classmates, all other assignments are considered to be late if handed in after the designated periods

You are responsible for checking that you are submitting the right version and that it can be opened. Your electronic submission will be graded as zero if the file is corrupt, empty, or an earlier version of the text was mistakenly submitted).

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%.

More information on assignments will be posted on MyCourses and shared throughout the semester.

Students' rights and responsibilities

Attendance and participation in class discussions.

You are responsible for all announcements made in class and on MyCourses. You should also check for new announcements, changes to these outlines or material on MyCourses at least weekly.

Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities

"As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009."

Remise des travaux en français

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

Review of a mark

You have the right to ask for a regrading if you feel 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 in advance.

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