

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Health and Human Services
Department of Global and Community Health

GCH 605: Social Epidemiology
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Spring 2008
Wednesday 4:30 to 7:10 PM

First day of class: January 23
Spring break: March 10-15
Last day of class: May 14

Venue: Robinson B-406

Instructor: Carlos Sluzki, MD, Professor, GCH/CHHS (csluzki@gmu.edu)

Pre or co-requisite: Graduate Statistics Class

Catalogue Description:

Social Epidemiology is a discipline focused on the relationships between social variables (from macro to personal social networks) and health. It incorporates social experiences as having a direct and indirect influence on health, disease and well-being. Students will examine the impact of macro social variables such as socio-economic status, cultural traditions, lifecycle stages, and circumstantial changes such as migration and relocation on health, and disease. They will also explore the health-enhancing and health-deteriorating effects of the personal social environment. In sum, through this course, students will learn the foundations of social epidemiology, and how to apply these principles in the practices of different professional careers within Global and Community health.

Objectives:

At the end of the course, the students will be able to:

- Discuss the basic principles and theories of social epidemiology.
- Apply the principles of social epidemiology to current health issues.
- Explore major personal social and macro social environment factors affecting health.
- Map a personal social environment.

- Critique different social environment configurations with relationship to health.
- Describe mechanisms by which personal social and macro social environment variations affect health.
- Describe mechanisms by which health affects personal social and macro social environment dynamics.
- Discuss cultural variations in social environment configurations.
- Develop health interventions using social epidemiology principles.

Required Text

Berkman, L.F. and Kawachi, I, Eds. (2000): Social Epidemiology. New York, Oxford University Press

Recommended references

Bates, F. L. (1997): Sociopolitical Ecology: Human systems and Ecological Fields. New York, Plenum

Cohen, S., Undrewood, LG and Gottlieb (2000): Social Support Measurement and Intervention: A Guide for Health and Social Scientists. New York, Oxford University Press,

In addition, readings will be assigned from a substantial archive of articles on the subject that will be located at the professor's office, and distributed as needed.

Weekly Lesson Plan:

1. Early projects, the pre-history of social epidemiology
2. The personal social network: model, map and the self
3. How social networks affect health and health affect social networks
4. Social integration, social networks, social support and health
Reading: Chapter 7, Berkman and Kawachi
5. Social cohesion, social capital and health
Reading: Chapter 8, Berkman and Kawachi
6. Socioeconomic position/ income inequality and health
Reading: Chapters 2 and 4, Berkman and Kawachi
7. Discrimination and health
Reading: Chapter 3, Berkman and Kawachi
8. Working conditions and health
Reading: Chapter 5, Berkman and Kawachi
9. Retirement, job losses and health
Reading: Chapter 6, Berkman and Kawachi

10. Depression and medical illness
Reading: Chapter 9, Berkman and Kawachi
11. Multilevel approaches to social determinants
Reading: Chapter 15, Berkman and Kawachi
12. Social support interventions
Reading: Chapters 6 and 9, Cohen et al.
13. Presentations by students
14. Presentations by student
Closure
Course evaluation

Teaching Strategies:

Teaching strategies will include lecture, discussion, students' presentations and discussion, group projects, and experiential learning through the exploration of their own personal social network. Occasional invited lecturers. Students are expected to read the assigned chapters/articles before the date of the corresponding class.

Grades

- Participation at class showing reading assignment proficiency = **40%**
- Mid-term essay (5 pages 1½ line spacing, synthesizing, comparing and cross-referencing three articles of different authors on a given subject --to the student's choice within the subjects presented and discussed--, demonstrating sound tracking of themes and reasoning)= **20%**
- Final assignment: development of a research proposal, individual or in dyads, that will be discussed with the instructor no less than 6 weeks before the end of the course, and presented and discussed with the course in one of the two last classes with an accompanying text no less than 10 pages long)= **40%**

Evaluation methods

Essays will be evaluated by their tracking of themes, reasoning, and sound use of references. Students will receive back their essay within 2 weeks, with notations and comments by the instructor.

Final assignments will be evaluated by the above plus the industriousness and feasibility of the project, the appropriateness of its research methodology and, when appropriate, the analysis of the results. It should be noted that at the end of the course students will either have completed a modest research project; or have developed a substantial research proposal that, because of its design, cannot be expected to be

completed within the allotted time, has developed the relationship with the site, so as to be able to carry it within the year and has pinpointed an potential source of external or internal support to submit it.

Academic Honesty: George Mason University operates under an honor system, which is published in the University Catalog and deals specifically with cheating, attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Please familiarize yourself with the honor code, especially the statement on plagiarism (<http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html>). If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with the professor.

Students with Disabilities: All students with questions or concerns about this class are encouraged to set up a time to meet with the professor, preferably during the first 2 weeks of the semester. Students with disabilities should work with the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) to identify appropriate accommodations and communicate those with the professor.

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