

# Global Health Inequalities: Economics, Ethics and Politics

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Course delivered at Villanova University, PA, USA  
Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies (GIS), Garey Hall, Room B05

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## Course Description

Life expectancy and health status play an essential role in development, yet despite some remarkable improvements, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, health remains an unequally distributed resource, both on a global scale and within populations.

This course offers a multidisciplinary approach to the topic of health inequalities, based on three perspectives for study: (1) an *economic* dimension, grounded in the links between health, poverty and employment; (2) a *social* dimension, that focuses on psycho-social determinants of health and the role played by health systems; and (3) a specifically *political* dimension, through which we will discuss the ethical foundations of state intervention against health inequality and look at how to assess the effects of policies in that area.

By design, this course will approach health inequalities through methods and concepts taken from various branches of the social sciences. How, for instance, can health economics measure these inequalities? What can political philosophy contribute to defining the ethics of global health? Even more generally, what is the overall contribution of the social sciences to the epidemiological study of health inequalities?

No previous knowledge in any of these topics is required for taking the course, but some curiosity in every of them will prove useful.

Note – This course is partly based on a [course given at Sciences Po, Paris](#), in 2010. The initial version of the course was taught by [Florence Jusot](#) in 2008-2009.

## Learning Objectives

- Acquire a **general overview of the topic** of health inequalities
- Experiment with the **analytical toolbox** used in health inequalities research
- Write up a **country-based health report** informed by the topic

## Course Logistics

Class dates and times are copied below.

- Session 1      **Feb 16, 2018 3pm-6pm**
- Session 2      **Feb 17, 2018 12pm-3pm**
- Session 3      **Feb 23, 2018 3pm-6pm**
- Session 4      **Feb 24, 2018 12pm-3pm**

All material relevant to the course will be distributed via a **Google Drive** folder, the link to which will be mentioned in our first class together. Although a Google account will not be required to access the folder, I do recommend that you create a (free) [Google account](#) if you do not yet have one.

Two of the practice workshops that will take place during the course will make use of the **Stata** statistical software, from [StataCorp](#). You do not need to own a copy of the software: the code will be run on my end.

## Course Assignments

- Sessions 3 and 4 of the course each include **reading workshops** – please read the texts listed in those *before class*.
- The course will be assessed through a **single final paper**, for which instructions and a submission deadline will be delivered during the last class.

## Important University Policies and Resources

**Students with Disabilities** who require academic accommodations should schedule an appointment with the Office for Learning Support. It is the policy of Villanova University to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. You must present verification and register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5636 or at [nancy.mott@villanova.edu](mailto:nancy.mott@villanova.edu). Registration is needed to receive accommodations.

**Academic Integrity** – You are expected to uphold Villanova’s Academic Integrity Policy and Code. Any incident of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for disciplinary action. For the College’s statement on Academic Integrity, you should consult the *Enchiridion*. You may also view the university’s Academic Integrity Policy and Code, as well as other useful information related to writing papers, at the Academic Integrity Gateway web site: <http://library.villanova.edu/Help/AcademicIntegrity>. The fundamental principle here is that you should hold others’ intellectual labor sacrosanct and the law holds you responsible for any attempt to pass others’ work in any shape or form as yours. In addition to the general process, if you violate the policy, you will score F in the assignment and forfeit up to 50% of your cumulative score in the course, depending on the gravity of the infraction. When in doubt, please see the instructor.

# Course Outline

## Session 1. Introduction

- Defining and Measuring Health
- Global Health Inequalities and Development

### Practice Workshop

Using [PubMed](#) to access the relevant academic literature.

### Selected Readings (1)

Deaton, A. 2003. "Health, Inequality, and Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature* 41(1): 113–58.

Krieger, N. et al. 2008. "The Fall and Rise of US Inequities in Premature Mortality: 1960–2002." *PLoS Medicine* 5(2): e46.

Marmot, M. 2006. "Health in an Unequal World." *Lancet* 368(9): 2081–94.

## Session 2. Socio-Economic Determinants

- **Poverty, Income and Employment**
  - Health as Human Capital
  - Health and Income Inequality
- **Psycho-social Determinants of Health**
  - Life-course Perspectives
  - Psycho-social Explanations

### Practice Workshop

Replication of Layte, R. and Whelan, C.T. 2009. "Explaining Social Class Inequalities in Smoking: The Role of Education, Self-Efficacy, and Deprivation," *European Sociological Review* 25(4): 399–410 [ see [layte\\_whelan.zip](#) in the course material ].

### Selected Readings (2.1) Poverty, Income and Employment

Jusot F. 2006. "The Shape of the Relationship between Mortality and Income in France." *Annales d'Économie et de Statistique* 83–84: 89–122.

Marmot, M. 2002. "The Influence of Income on Health: Views of an Epidemiologist." *Health Affairs* 21(2): 31–46.

Smith, J. 1999. "Healthy Bodies and Thick Wallets: The Dual Relation between Health and Economic Status." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13(2): 145–166.

van Doorslaer, E. and Koolman, X. 2004. "Explaining the Differences in Income-Related Health Inequalities Across European Countries." *Health Economics* 13(7): 609–28 [see also the guest editorial in the same issue on the ECuity project].

Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. 2008. "Income Inequality and Socioeconomic Gradients in Mortality." *American Journal of Public Health* 98(4): 699–704 [ see also their paper in *Social Science & Medicine* 62(7): 1768–84, 2006 ].

## **Selected Readings (2.2) Psycho-social Determinants of Health**

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): 125–42.

Sekine, M. 2009. "Socioeconomic Inequalities in Physical and Mental Functioning of British, Finnish, and Japanese Civil Servants: Role of Job Demand, Control, and Work Hours." *Social Science & Medicine* 69(10): 1417–25.

Salavecz, G. *et al.* 2010. "Work Stress and Health in Western European and Post-Communist Countries: An East-West Comparison Study." *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 64(1): 57–62.

## **Session 3. Health System Inequalities**

- **Introduction to Health Systems**
  - Health System Classification
  - Health System Reforms
- **Health Systems Inequalities**
  - Physician-Induced Inequalities
  - Insurance-Induced Inequalities

### **Reading Workshop**

Balsa, A. *et al.* 2005. "Testing for Statistical Discrimination in Health Care." *Health Services Research* 40(1): 227–252 [see also the paper in *Journal of Health Economics* 20(6): 881–907].

O'Malley, M.-S. *et al.* 2001. "The Association of Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Physician Recommendation for Mammography: Who Gets the Message about Breast Cancer Screening ?" *American Journal of Public Health* 91(1): 49–54.

### **Practice Workshop**

Replication of Eikemo, T.A. *et al.* 2008. "[Welfare State Regimes and Differences in Self-perceived Health in Europe: A Multilevel Analysis](#)," *Social Science & Medicine* 66(11): 2281–95 [ see [eikemo\\_et\\_al.zip](#) in the course material ].

### Selected Readings (3)

Ayanian, J.-Z. *et al.* 2000. “Unmet Health Needs of Uninsured Adults in the United States.” *JAMA* 2061–69.

Dourgnon P. *et al.* 2001. “L’assurance-maladie réduit-elle les inégalités sociales de santé ?” *Questions d’économie de la santé* 43 [ in French ].

Ross, C.-E. and Mirowsky, J. 2000. “Does Medical Insurance Contribute to Socioeconomic Differentials in Health ?” *Milbank Quarterly* 78: 291–320.

van Doorslaer, E. and O’Donnell, O. 2010. “Measurement and Explanation of Inequality in Health and Health Care in Low-Income Settings.” In McGillivray, M. et Dutta, I. (dir.), *Advancing Health Equity*, Palgrave MacMillan [ first published as UNU-WIDER Discussion Paper No. 2008/04 ].

Wagstaff, A. *et al.* 2003. “On Decomposing the Causes of Health Sector Inequalities with an Application to Malnutrition Inequalities in Vietnam.” *Journal of Econometrics* 112: 207–23 [ first published as World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2714 ].

Wilper, A. *et al.* 2009. “Health Insurance and Mortality in US Adults.” *American Journal of Public Health* 99(12): 2289–95.

## Session 4. Ethical and Policy Approaches

- **Ethical Foundations of Public Health**
  - ‘Classical’ Justice Approaches
  - Health Justice Approaches
- **Politics of Health Inequalities**
  - Theories of Agenda-Setting
  - Comparative Case Studies

### Reading Workshop

Roemer, J. 1998. *Equality of Opportunity*. Harvard University Press [ §8, pp. 43–53 ].

**Note** – This looks like a short reading, but it adopts a highly formalized approach that might require some additional background reading if you have never studied welfare economics.

### Selected Readings (4.1) Ethical Approaches

Deaton, A. 2002. “Policy Implications of the Gradient of Health and Wealth.” *Health Affairs* 21(2): 13–30.

Fleurbaey, M. 2006. “Health, Equity and Social Welfare.” *Annales d’Économie et de Statistique* 83–84: 21–59.

Fleurbaey, M. and Schokkaert, E. 2009. "Unfair Inequalities in Health and Health Care." *Journal of Health Economics* 28(1): 73–90.

Gwatkin, D. 2000. "Health Inequalities and the Health of the Poor: What Do We Know? What Can We Do?" *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 78(1): 3–18.

Venkatapuram, S. and Marmot, M. 2009. "Epidemiology and Social Justice in Light of Social Determinants of Health Research." *Bioethics* 23(2): 79–89.

### **Selected Readings (4.2) Policy Approaches**

Beckfield, J. and Krieger, N. 2009. "Epi+Demos+Cracy: Linking Political Systems and Priorities to the Magnitude of Health Inequities—Evidence, Gaps, and a Research Agenda." *Epidemiological Reviews* 31(1): 152–77.

Exworthy, M. 2002. "The 'Second Black Report'? The Acheson Report as Another Opportunity to Tackle Health Inequalities." *Contemporary British History* 16(3): 175–97 [see also the other papers in that issue (then published as a book edited by V. Berridge and S. Blume in 2003) for contextual data on the Black Report].

Navarro, V. and Shi, L. 2001. "The Political Context of Social Inequalities and Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 53(3): 481–91 [ see also the paper by Navarro *et al.* in the *Lancet* 368(9540): 1033–37 ].

Whitehead, M. 1998. "Diffusion of Ideas on Social Inequalities in Health: A European Perspective." *Milbank Quarterly* 76(3): 469–49.

# Additional Readings

## Policy Documents

[World Health Organization] Commission on Social Determinants of Health. 2008. *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*.

Haut Conseil pour la Santé Publique. 2009. *Les inégalités sociales de santé : sortir de la fatalité* [ in French ].

[U.S.] Institute of Medicine. 2008. *The U.S. Commitment to Global Health: Recommendations for the New Administration*.

Marmot, M. 2010. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post–2010* [ a.k.a. “The Marmot Review” ].

Marmot, M. and Wilkinson, R. (eds). 2003. *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*, 2nd ed.

Potvin, L., Moquet, M.-J. and Jones, C.M. (eds). *Réduire les inégalités sociales en santé* [ in French ]. INPES [ French National Institute for Health Prevention and Education ].

UCL Institute of Health Equity. 2014. *Review of Social Determinants and the Health Divide in the WHO European Region: Final Report* [ first published 2013 ].

World Health Organization. 2013. *The Economics of Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities: A Resource Book*.

## Academic Research

Anand, S., Peter, F. and Sen, A. (eds). 2004. *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*. Oxford University Press.

Asthana, S. and Halliday, J. (eds). 2011. *What Works in Tackling Health Inequalities? Pathways, Policies and Practice through the Lifecourse*. Policy Press.

Buchbinder, M., Rivkin-Fish, M. and Walker, R.L. (eds). 2016. *Understanding Health Inequalities and Justice. New Conversations across the Disciplines*. University of North Carolina Press.

Daniels, N. 2008. *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*. Cambridge University Press.

Eyal, N. et al. (eds). 2013. *Inequalities in Health: Concepts, Measures, and Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Graham, H. (ed.). 2009. *Understanding Health Inequalities*. 2nd ed. Open University Press.

Hall, P. and Lamont, M. (eds). 2009. *Successful Societies. How Institutions and Culture Affect Health*. Cambridge University Press.

Marmot, M. and Wilkinson, R. (eds). 2005. *Social Determinants of Health*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press.

Ruger, J. 2010. *Health and Social Justice*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, K.E., Hill, S. and Bambra, C. (eds). 2016. *Health inequalities. Critical Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Venkatapuram, S. 2011. *Health Justice*. Polity.

## **Selected Websites**

Chetty, R. *et al.* [n.d.]. [The Health Inequality Project](#).

Harris, E. and Loyd, J. 2014. [\[Public Health\] Inequities](#). Oxford Bibliographies.

Muntaner, C., Mahabir, D.F. and Gunn, V. 2017. [Social Determinants of Health](#). Oxford Bibliographies.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. [n.d.]. [Health Inequalities](#).

Sreenivasan, G. 2014. [Justice, Inequality, and Health](#). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Todres, J. 2017. [Health and Human Rights](#). Oxford Bibliographies.

University College London [UCL]. 2012. [INEQ-CITIES Project](#).

Venkatapuram, S. 2016. [Social Justice \[and Public Health\]](#). Oxford Bibliographies.

World Health Organization [WHO]. [n.d.]. [Social Determinants of Health](#).