

## Course Syllabus- Health inequalities: understanding our worse epidemic

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**Language of Instruction:** English

**Professor:** Joan Benach

**Professor's Contact and Office Hours:** [joan.benach@upf.edu](mailto:joan.benach@upf.edu).

**Course Contact Hours:** 12h (every day during the course, after each session by appointment)

**Recommended Credit:** 2 ECTS credits

**Weeks:** 1

**Course Prerequisites:** It is recommended to have notions of sociology and public health

**Language Requirements:** None

### **Course Description:**

Why do low-income countries, regions and neighborhoods have a much lower life expectancy than high-income areas? Why less favored social groups have worse health than better-off groups? Why some populations enjoy better health than others? How and why has been the impact of the covid-19 pandemic? What can be done to improve this situation? According to the hegemonic biomedical approach, the main reasons for the production of health are biology and genetics, unhealthy life-styles, and deficiencies in the access and use of health services. Available knowledge however shows that other factors play a significant role. First, because political and social determinants (e.g., power relations, social policies, poverty, work, housing, etc.) have a larger effect on health, and quality of life. And second, because these determinants are strongly related to axes of inequality such as social class, gender, ethnic origin, migration status and territory. Using a transdisciplinary integrated approach, this course introduces the student to the characteristics, causes, and potential solutions of health inequalities, which is a key indicator of justice and quality of life.

### **Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the course the student will have acquired tools to critically address the following aspects:

- Value the importance and characteristics of social inequalities as a crucial public health issue.
- Analyze key axes of social inequality such as social class, gender, and territory from an intersectional approach.
- Identify the main debates on the mechanisms of production of health inequality.
- Review transdisciplinarity proposals in the field.
- Acquire notions regarding the interest and usefulness of adopting an approach based on politics, history and complex systems thinking.

### **Course Workload**

The course is divided into lectures, use of video clips, and discussions. Students should be prepared to read before and during the course.

### **Methods of Instruction:**

Eight hours of theoretical classes divided into 4 days.

Seven hours of internship: 4 hours (1 hour per day after the theoretical classes) of debate or group work + 3 hours on the last day for the presentation of group work and discussion

**Method of Assessment**

- Participation in classes and debates: 25%
- Presentation in the last session of final work in small groups: 25%
- Paper. Individual final work: 50% (to be delivered one week after the end of the course).

The paper must have a length of maximum 2,000 words (not counting references). During the first class the groups will be defined. The topics of group work would be one aspect on the covid-19 pandemic related to the topics covered during the course (e.g., origins of the pandemic, strategies on confinement, health systems, impacts on health and inequalities, role of the media, governments, industry, communities, etc). Each group will discuss a proposal for analysis and methodology.

**Absence Policy**

Attending class is mandatory and will be monitored daily by professors. The impact of absences on the final grade is as follows:

<b>Absences</b>	<b>Penalization</b>
Up to one (1) absence	2 points subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale).
Two (2) absences	The student receives an INCOMPLETE for the course

The BISS attendance policy does not distinguish between justified or unjustified absences. The student is deemed responsible to manage his/her absences.

Emergency situations (hospitalization, family emergency, etc.) will be analyzed on a case by case basis by the Academic Director of the UPF Barcelona International Summer School.

**Classroom Norms:**

- There will be a fifteen-minute break during the class.
- Students must come to class having read as much as possible about the contents of the course.

**Course Contents:**

SESSION 1. July 18, 2022 (9-12)

Overview of the course. The science of Public Health: key concepts, advances and limitations; theories & causal models of health inequities production  
Discussion

SESSION 2. July 19, 2022 (9-12h)

Social Determinants, fundamental causes, and inequalities; intersectionalities and disease embodiment  
Discussion

SESSION 3. July 20 2022 (9-12h)

Introducing complexity & systems thinking; the examples of obesity and global precarization of work.  
Discussion

SESSION 4. July 21, 2022 (9-12h)

Political economy, capitalism, neoliberalism, and health inequalities; welfare state, austerity programs, and their effects; health equity as indicator of social justice; the socioecological crisis.  
Discussion

SESSION 5. July 22, 2022 (9-12h)  
Presentations and Discussion.

**Required Readings:** The following are the main readings for the course..

- Wing S. Whose epidemiology, whose health? *Int J Health Services* 1998;28:241-252.
- Levins R, Lopez C. Toward an ecosocial view of health. *Int J Health Serv.* 1999;29(2):261-93.
- Navarro V. What we mean by social determinants of health. *Int J Health Serv,* 2009;39(3):423-441.
- Solar O, Irwin A. A Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health. April 2010.  
[https://www.who.int/sdhconference/resources/ConceptualframeworkforactiononSDH\\_eng.pdf](https://www.who.int/sdhconference/resources/ConceptualframeworkforactiononSDH_eng.pdf)
- Link BG, Phelan KC. Understanding Sociodemographic differences in health - The role of fundamental social causes. *Am J Public Health* 1996;86:471-473.
- Krieger N. Embodiment: a conceptual glossary for epidemiology. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2005;59(5):350-5.
- Diez Roux AV. Complex systems thinking and current impasses in health disparities research. *Am J Public Health.* 2011;101(9):1627-34.
- Benach J, Vives A, Tarafa G, et al. What should we know about precarious employment and health in 2025? Framing the agenda for the next decade of research. *Int J Epidemiol* 2016; 1-7. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyv342
- Raworth K. A Doughnut for the Anthropocene: humanity's compass in the 21st century. *Lancet*, 2017: e48-e49. Available at:  
<https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2542-5196%2817%2930028-1>
- Krieger N. Genders, sexes and health: what are the connections – and why does it matter? *Int J Epidemiol* 2003;32:652-657
- Diez-Roux AV. Neighborhoods and Health: What Do We Know? What Should We Do? *Am J Public Health* 2016;106:430-431.
- Benach J, Malmusi D, Yasui Y, Martínez JM. A new typology of policies to tackle health inequalities and scenarios of impact based on Rose's population approach. *J Epidemiol Community Health.* 2013;67(3):286-91.

### **Recommended bibliography:**

Students are encouraged to consult the following sources on their own.

Introductory:

- Amick III BC, Levine S, Tarlov AR, Chapman Walsh D, eds. *Society and Health.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Benach J, Muntaner C. *Aprender a mirar la salud: como la desigualdad social daña nuestra salud.* Barcelona: Viejo Topo, 2005
- Benach J, Muntaner C, Tarafa G, Valverde C. *La sanidad está en venta (y también nuestra salud).* Barcelona: Icaria, 2012.
- Berkman L, Kawachi I, eds. *Social Epidemiology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Borrell C, Benach J (coord). *Desigualtats socials en salut a Catalunya.* Barcelona: Mediterrània, 2003.
- Borrell C, Benach J (coord). *L'evolució de les desigualtats en la salut a Catalunya.* Barcelona: Mediterrània, 2005.
- Comisión para Reducir las Desigualdades Sociales en Salud en España. *Propuesta de políticas e intervenciones para reducir las desigualdades sociales en salud en España.* Gac Sanit. 2011. doi:10.1016/j.gaceta.2011.07.024.  
[http://www.elsevier.es/sites/default/files/elsevier/eop/SO213-9111\(11\)00302-5.pdf](http://www.elsevier.es/sites/default/files/elsevier/eop/SO213-9111(11)00302-5.pdf)
- Hart N. *The sociology of Health and Medicine.* Lancashire: Causeway, 1997.
- Kawachi I, Kennedy BP. *The Health of Nations: Why Inequality Is Harmful to Your Health.* New York: TheNew Press, 2002.
- Marmot M. *The Status syndrome. How social standing affects our health and longevity.* New York: An Owl Book, 2004.

- Wilkinson M, Marmot MG. Social determinants of health. The Solid facts. Copenhagen: Centre for Urban Health. World Health Organization, 1998. Available: <http://www.who.dk/document/e59555.pdf>
- Wilkinson RG. Las desigualdades perjudican. Jerarquías, salud y evolución humana. Barcelona: Crítica, 2001 [ed. orig, 2000].

Advanced:

- Bartley M, Blane D, Davey Smith G. The sociology of health inequalities. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- Bartley M. Health Inequality: an introduction to theories concepts and methods. Cambridge: Polity press, 2004.
- Benach J, Muntaner C, con Solar O, santanna V, Quinlan M. Empleo, trabajo y desigualdades en salud: Una Visión Global. Barcelona: Icaria, 2010.
- Benzeval M, Judge K, Whitehead M. Tackling inequalities in health. An agenda for action. Londres: King's Fund, 1995.
- Birn A-E, Pillay Y, Holtz TH. (eds). 2017. Textbook of Global Health. Oxford University Press.
- Blane D, Brunner E, Wilkinson R, eds. Health and Social Organization. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Bradby H, Humphris R, Newall D, Phillimore J. Public health aspects of migrant health: a review of the evidence on health status for refugees and asylum seekers in the European Region Health Evidence Network synthesis report 44. Copenhagen: WHO, 2015.
- Breihl J. Critical Epidemiology and the People's Health. Oxford : OUP, 2021
- Case A, Deaton A. Deaths of Despair and the future of Capitalism. Princeton: PUP 2020.
- El-Sayed AM, Galea S. Systems Science and Population Health. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017.
- Evans RG, Barer ML, Marmor TR, eds. ¿Por qué alguna gente esta sana y otra no?. Los determinantes de la salud de las poblaciones. Madrid: Ediciones Diaz de Santos 1996 [ed. or. 1994].
- Hickel J. The Divide. Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets. New York: W.W.Norton & Co, 2017.
- Hickel J. Less is more. How Degrowth Will Save the World. London: William Heinemann, 2020.
- International organization for Migration (IOM). Migration Health Annual Report 2017. Geneva: IOM, 2017.
- Jones K, Moon G. Health, disease and society. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.
- Krieger N. Ecosocial theory, embodied truths, and the people's health. Oxford: OUP, 2021.
- Labonté R, Ruckert A. Health Equity in a Globalizing Era. Past challenges, future prospects. Oxford OUP, 2019.
- Mackenbach JP, Bakker M (eds). Reducing inequalities in health: A European perspective. Routledge, 2002.
- Marmot M, Wilkinson RG, eds. Social determinants of Health. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Meadows DH. Thinking in Systems. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008.
- Navarro V, ed. The Political Economy of Social Inequalities. Consequences for Health and Quality of Life. Baltimore: Baywood, 2000.
- Navarro V, Muntaner C (eds). Political and Economic Determinants of Population Health and Well-Being: Controversies and Developments
- Shaw M, Dorling D, Gordon D, Davey Smith G. The widening gap. Health inequalities and Policy in Britain. Bristol: Policy Press, 1999.
- Schulz AJ, Mullings L. Gender, race, class, and health. Jossey-Bass 2006.
- Susser M, Watson W, Hopper K. Sociology in Medicine (3 ed). N York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Waitzkin H (ed). Health care under the knife. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018.

- Wallace R. Big Farms make big flu. New York: Monthly University Press, 2016.
- Wallace R. Dead Epidemiologists: On the origins of covid-19. NY: Monthly Review Press, 2020.
- Wilkinson RG. Unhealthy societies. The Afflictions of inequality. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Wilkinson RG. The impact of inequality. How to make societies healthier. London: New Press, 2005.
- Wilkinson RG, Pickett K. Desigualdad. un análisis de la (in)felicidad colectiva. Madrid: Turner, 2009.
- Zywert K, Quilley S (eds). Health in the Anthropocene. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020.

Covid-19: selected papers (other recommendations will be provided during the course)

- Benach J. “The Official Story of the Coronavirus Hides a Systemic Crisis”. The Bullet. March 28, 2020. Available: <https://socialistproject.ca/2020/03/official-story-of-coronavirus-hides-systemic-crisis/>
- Benach J. “The Pandemic Kills the Poor: Inequality Will Kill Them Even More.” The Bullet. May 6, 2020. Available: <https://socialistproject.ca/2020/05/pandemic-kills-the-poor-inequality-will-kill-more/#more>