



Western University

**Sociology 4472F
Health Inequalities
Fall 2020**

Tuesdays 3:30-6:30pm

Kate H. Choi

Office Hours: By appointment

Office Location: Virtual via Zoom

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Course Description:

At the onset of the pandemic, COVID-19 was thought to be the "great equalizer" – affecting the advantaged and disadvantaged alike. As time passed, we came to realize that nothing was far from the truth. Vulnerable populations – the poor, the elderly, racial minorities, and immigrants – bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also know that inequalities in fatality and infection rates as well as steps taken to curb the pandemic (e.g., lock-down policies or closing down of the economy) may exacerbate existing inequalities.

The goal of this course is to (a) examine social determinants of health, (b) describe inequalities in infection risk of COVID-19, (c) discuss why these differences emerge, and (d) examine how COVID-19 may be exacerbating existing inequalities.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Gain insights about patterns and trends in inequalities in COVID-19 infection and fatality rates by socioeconomic status, age, race/ethnicity, and immigration status
- Identify the social mechanisms contributing to these inequalities
- Assess how policies implemented to curb the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate existing inequalities

Prerequisite(s):

Enrollment in the third or fourth year of one of the Honor's Specializations or Double Majors in Sociology.

Unless you fulfill either requisite for this course or written special permission to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Requirements

There are three requirements for this course: (1) two research papers and (2) a policy paper. The specific requirements are described in greater detail below.

Lecture format

Plan A: If everything goes as planned and there are no technological issues:

- 9:30-9:39 am: Students will be e-mailed the zoom link with the password. They will use this link to login.
- 9:40-10:55 pm: Lecture
- 10:55-11:00pm: Break
- 11:00-11:45 am: Discussion

- Weekly assignment:
- Students fill out *Extra Credit Participation Diary* in the Assignment section of OWL. They need to state
 - What they said during the discussion.
 - If they wanted to say something else but could not, they should write that down. This cannot be a repeat of what someone else said.
 - Must be completed by 9:30 am of the following Monday.
- In the absence of an *extra credit participation diary*, I will award you 0 points.
- Caveat: Timeline is an estimate. I reserve the right to allocate different amounts of time to each portion of the activity depending on student interest and quality of discussion.

Required Text(s):

Barr, Donald. 2019. Health Disparities in the United States: *Social class, race, ethnicity, and social determinants of health.* (Barr)

Other papers can be downloaded from popular media websites, jstor.org, and scholar.google.com. For the last two sites, you can download the university VPN or log in through the library.

Method of Evaluation:

Below is a detailed description of the work requirements of this course.

Option A:

Research paper 33%

Legal Brief 33%

Policy Paper 34%

Option B:

Research paper 50%

Legal brief or Policy Paper 50%

Research Paper 1

- A 1500-word paper examining the plight of a vulnerable population (e.g., Indigenous, lower-income, immigrants, racial minorities, young mothers, youth)
- I will provide a detailed description of the topic and grading rubric at least 2 weeks ahead of time.
 - Due date: **October 19, 2021, at 6:30pm**
 - Method of turning in your assignment: You need to e-mail it to hchoi228@uwo.ca and post it in the Dropbox section in OWL. I will send you a receipt confirmation e-mail within 30 minutes of the end of class. You need to have the confirmation e-mail to receive marks for this assignment.

Legal brief – Optional

- 1500-word legal brief asking students to weigh in on the debate about mandatory power vaccinations.
 - Should there be a mandatory vaccination policy? Why?
 - Should there be exemptions?
- I will provide a detailed description of the topic and grading rubric at least 2 weeks ahead of time.
- If a student prefers an alternate
- Due date: **December 6, 2021, at 6:30 pm** (i.e., last day of class)
- Method of turning in your assignment: You need to e-mail it to hchoi228@uwo.ca and post it in the Dropbox section in OWL. I will send you a receipt confirmation e-mail within 30 minutes of the end of class. You need to have the confirmation e-mail to receive marks for this assignment.

Take-home test: policy paper

- 1500-word policy brief asking students to write a policy paper outlining your desired university environment.
- Your proposal has to be evidenced based. Think about this like a longer opinion piece that you could place in a newspaper. It needs to showcase your expertise on the matter.
- I will provide a detailed description of the topic and the grading rubric on the last day of class in accordance with University Senate Regulations.
- Due date: **Ending time of final exam** (TBD by the Registrar's Office)
- Method of turning in your assignment: You need to e-mail it to hchoi228@uwo.ca and post it in the Dropbox section in OWL. I will send you a receipt confirmation e-mail within 30 minutes of the end of class. You need to have the confirmation e-mail to receive marks for this assignment.

Extra Credit: Participation

- Participation is an important aspect of all my classes. It is also the part that students find most enjoyable. It also helps students develop mastery in the verbal skill sets necessary to help students perform better in job interviews, team meetings upon employment, and when they enroll in law/graduate schools. We are, however, living in the era of COVID-19 and many of you are logging in remotely. It would be unfair to penalize a student's internet connection is not working,

but it would also be unfair for me to penalize students who participate actively. Below is a "hybrid" approach to ensure fairness for all students.

- *Expectations to obtain extra credit:* You are expected to attend class and have the materials read ahead of class. You should answer questions posed in class or ask questions of your own relevant to the material. You should substantiate your insights with empirical evidence from your readings. You are allowed some leeway in terms of bringing outside material, but it needs to be factually accurate, you need to cite where you read it from, and you need to link with the material being discussed.
- In the seven days following a class, students will be asked to write what they said in each class in the assignment section in OWL. The extra credit participation grade will be computed based on my notes of your participation in class (75%) and your post (25%).
- The scores roughly correspond to the following. I reserve the right to adjust the grades depending on the quality of the discussions.
 - 0: no attendance
 - 1: attendance no participation
 - 2: attendance with at least one participation
 - 3: attendance with 2 or more participations – comments tend to be a hit or miss
 - 4: attendance with 2 or more participations and most comments made a significant contribution to the class.
 - Midterm and final scores: The student will be ranked based on their cumulative scores for the first latter half of the class.
 - Top 20%: 10 extra points in the corresponding exam
 - 21-40%: 8 extra points in the corresponding exam
 - 41-60%: 6 extra points in the corresponding exam
 - 61-80%: 4 extra points in the corresponding exam
 - 81-100%: 2 extra points if attended more than half the classes and no disruption
 - Disruption, did not attend more than half the classes: 0 points
- Some students are very verbose. Getting to the point quickly is an important skill to develop for the job market and upon employment. Several studies have discussed the adverse consequences of “zoom-fatigue”. I want you to try to summarize your point of view in less than 2 minutes unless I prompt you to elaborate.
- Some students have a fear of public speaking. I really encourage students to try to verbalize their point of view. At the beginning of class, the students can use the chat function in zoom where they can type their remarks. The remark has to be less than 3 sentences. Starting in week 5, the students to refrain from using the chat function and verbalize their point of views. If you have a fear of public speaking, you can first ask a very simple question on week 2; make a substantive point on week 3, try to ask a longer question, or make a substantive point by week 4.
- This is a class where we discuss the social determinants of health inequality. In this class, we value **scientific facts** over opinion. This is not a class where you advance your political agenda or try to indoctrinate your fellow classmates with your political point of view. Repeated failure to

“disrupt” class in this manner are unwelcome and will be considered “disruptive behavior”. The instructor reserves the sole right to assess and deem what constitutes as “disruptive behavior”.

- To ensure that our class is a pleasant learning environment for everyone, there is a zero-tolerance policy towards disruptive behavior in class. The first time - you will receive a warning in writing; the second time- I will mute you for 3 consecutive classes, preventing you from getting any extra points during that time. The third time – the student will be asked to leave the class; the student will be uninvited from zoom, and I will request that the student be considered for disciplinary action.
- *Zoom etiquette:* Please mute your voices unless you would like to speak. This ensures that everyone can hear the person who is speaking. Turning on the cameras are not mandatory. Nonetheless, I usually adjust the pace of instruction or decide to re-explain things based on my read of a classroom. Your facial expressions (in conjunction with your questions) are valuable for my teaching efficacy. Therefore, I will offer 1 extra credit marks on each assignment for students who consistently turn on their cameras. Please be proactive with the questions because zoom removes the face-to-face ability for presenters to read a room.

Expected class average and grade distribution

Expected mean GPA: 84 percent. Expected standard deviation: 3 percentage points. I will have some discretion about the number depending on the class performance.

Important note: Students **must** complete 2 out of 3 assignments to receive a pass and/or a numerical grade. Even with proper documentation, failure to complete 2 components means that you will need to (a) retake the class in the following term or (b) write a 4,500-word essay by a date designated by the Dean's Office.

If you don't foresee being able to complete 2 out of 3 assignments, then you should consider dropping it by November 12, 2021 (i.e., the official date for dropping the course). Students are responsible for making all arrangements, including double-checking the drop/add date.

How to Contact Me:

E-mail is the best way to contact me. During weekdays, allow for 24 hours until response. During weekends, allow for 48 hours until response. I also reserve the right to address your question at the following class, if it is applicable to all students.

Grade negotiation

- I provide a rubric before class on how your papers will be graded.
- You will be graded on a curve.
- I will not entertain verbal grade negotiations. Research suggests that the likelihood of approaching faculty to verbally negotiate grades are lower for women than for men, more disadvantaged than advantaged students, younger relative to older students, and visible minority relative to other students. As someone committed to fairness, I will not entertain verbal grade

negotiations. Instead, you must write a memo contesting a section of the grade and explain why your grade deserves to be raised within 7 days or receiving your grade. This approach is taken to ensure that the process is fair and a learning experience.

- Without proper documentation, I cannot excuse students from assignments on grounds of compassion. It is also worth noting that I cannot alter grades on grounds of compassion.

IMPORTANT POLICIES

Standard Western Policies except for Policies for Assignment Deadlines

Policies for Assignment Deadlines:

If you miss a due date for an assignment due to illness or for any other unforeseen reason, you must notify your Academic Counselor within 48 hours. Please follow the Academic Counselor's instructions about proper documentation. For example, if your problem is medical in nature, you should hand in a doctor's note to the Academic Counselor for the due date of the assignment. If your Academic Counselor agrees that your reasons are legitimate and are supported by your medical doctor's documentation, you will be allowed to write a makeup exam.

For late papers without proper documentation, you will be deducted 10 percentage points per business day, with a weekend (Saturday and Sunday) counting as a business day. This means that you do not need to turn in your paper after 10 business days.

With documentation and for one paper, you have the option of obtaining the extension for the number of days agreed specified by the Academic Counselor or the Dean's Office or foregoing turning in the paper. I will reweigh your grade excluding that paper. The remaining two papers will each be worth 50%.

Even with an excuse, students who cannot complete 2 or more assignments by the final exam date (to be announced by the registrar's office) will receive a grade of incomplete or fail the course.

A special emergency clause reflecting the times: If the student has a long-term medical emergency and can obtain an "excuse" from both Academic Counseling and Dean's Office, they can forego the three writing assignments and write a 4,500-word paper on a topic of the Professor's choosing by a deadline specified by the Professor in consultation with the Dean's Office. The Professor will grade this paper in **absolute** terms.

The specifics of this will be worked out in consultation with Academic Counselling, the chair, and the Professor. This consideration will not proceed if the Professor disagrees with the terms of the arrangement.

It is the student's responsibility to communicate their need for such an arrangement as soon as possible.

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation: https://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/academic_consideration.html

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

Self-reported absences cannot be used for this class because all assignments exceed 30% of the final grade.

Tentative schedule

Note: COVID-19 research is changing constantly. I may switch the readings a bit. I will tell you about the exact readings 7 days prior to class so that you don't read the wrong article.

Week 1 (9/14). Introduction

Week 2 (9/21). What is Health? How should we define it? How should we measure it?

- Barr – Chapter 1
- Coronavirus March 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRkXhR4SiIQ>
- Before class: Watch Contagion – on your own (Available in *Netflix* and *Itunes*)

Weeks 3 and 4 (9/28~10/5). SES and Health

- Barr – Chapters 3-4
- Massey, D. S., Wagner, B., Donnelly, L., McLanahan, S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Garfinkel, I., Mitchell, C., & Notterman, D. A. (2018). Neighborhood Disadvantage and Telomere Length: Results from the Fragile Families Study. *The Russell Sage Foundation journal of the social sciences: RSF*, 4(4), 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2018.4.4.02>
- Cohen, J. and Kai Kupferschmidt. (2021). Rich countries cornered COVID-19 vaccine doses. Four strategies to right a ‘scandalous inequity. *Science Magazine*. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/05/rich-countries-cornered-covid-19-vaccine-doses-four-strategies-right-scandalous>.
- Long, Heather (2020, August 13). “The recession is over for the rich, but the working class is far from recovered”. *Washington Post*.

Supplementary readings.

- Castro, M. (2020). “Challenges of COVID-19 in Latin America”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwaEmbsMrik> (38:18~59:18)
- Coll, Steven. 2019. [The Jail Health-Care Crisis](#). *New Yorker*. March 4.
- [As coronavirus spreads, housekeepers in L.A. declare staying home ‘a luxury’](#) LA Times 3/3/15
- Lah, K. “Laid off and now evicted amid Covid-19, a Houston father contemplates homelessness in a pandemic”. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/02/us/houston-evictions-crisis/index.html>
- [Lockdown worked for the rich, but not for the poor. The untold story of how COVID-19 spread across Toronto, in 7 graphics](#). *Toronto Star*

Week 5 (10/12): Reading week

Week 6-7: (10/19, 10/26): Race, Ethnicity, Migration Status, and Health

- Barr- Chapters 5-6 and 10
 - Gilbert C. Gee, Anna Hing, Selina Mohammed, Derrick C. Tabor, David R. Williams. (2019). "Racism and the Life Course: Taking Time Seriously", *American Journal of Public Health* 109(S1): pp. S43-S47. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304766>
 - Thakur, N. and colleagues (2020). [The Structural and Social Determinants of the Racial/Ethnic Disparities in the U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic: What's Our Role?](#) *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.
 - Choi, K., P. Denice, M. Haan, A. Zajacova. (2021). Studying the Social Determinants of COVID-19. *Canadian Review of Sociology* 58(2): 146-164. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cars.12336>
 - Ng. E. (2021). COVID-19 deaths among immigrants: Evidence from the early months of the pandemic. Statistics Canada Report. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00017-eng.htm>
 - Statistics Canada. 2020. Economic impact of COVID-19 among visible minority groups. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00042-eng.pdf?st=LOdLUeXC>
- Renee Luthra and A. Nandi. "[Is hate crime rising during the Covid-19 crisis?](#)"

Supplementary Readings

- Refugee Camps: "[No Soap, Little Water, and No Way Out: Refugee Camps Brace for Coronavirus](#)" T. Hume for *Vice News* 3/13/20
- Qian, Y. and W. Fan. (2020). [Who loses income during the COVID-19 outbreak? Evidence from China.](#) *RSSM*.
- [What are the reopen protestors really saying?](#)" The conversation D. Daly

Due date: Research paper.

Week 8 (11/2). School closures and COVID-19

- Gallager-MacKay, K., P. Srivastava, K. Underwood, E. Dhuey et al. (2021). COVID-19 and Education Disruption in Ontario: Emerging Evidence on Impacts. <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/covid-19-and-education-disruption-in-ontario-emerging-evidence-on-impacts/>
- Lee, E. and Z. Parolin. (2021). The Care Burden during COVID-19: A National Database of Child Care Closures in the United States. *Socius*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23780231211032028?icid=int.sj-full-text.similar-articles.1>

Week 9 (11/9): Student private sessions for paper

Week 10 (11/16). Gender, health, and COVID-19

- Case A, Paxson C (2005). Sex differences in morbidity and mortality. *Demography* 42(2):189–214
- Kluger, J. (2021). Domestic Violence if a Pandemic within the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Times*. <https://time.com/5928539/domestic-violence-covid-19/>
- United Nations. (2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women (2021). https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf
- Calarco, J., E. Meanwell, E. Anderson, and A, Knopf. (2021). By Default: How Mothers in Different-Sex Dual-Earner Couples Account for Inequalities in Pandemic Parenting. *Socius*

Week 11 (11/23) Infodemic, privacy, and COVID-19

- Evanega, S., M. Lynas, J. Adams, and K. Smonleyak. (2020). Coronavirus misinformation: quantifying sources and themes in the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’. https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Evanega-et-al-Coronavirus-misinformation-submitted_07_23_20-1.pdf
- Cinelli, M., Quattrocioni, W., Galeazzi, A. *et al.* The COVID-19 social media infodemic. *Sci Rep* 10, 16598 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-73510-5>
- Park, S., G. Choi, and H. Koo. (2020). [Information Technology–Based Tracing Strategy in Response to COVID-19 in South Korea—Privacy Controversies](#). *Jama*.
- Ding, Huiling and Elizabeth Pitts. 2013. [Singapore's Quarantine Rhetoric and Human Rights in Emergency Health Risks](#). *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization*.

Suggested readings:

<https://theconversation.com/digital-privacy-and-covid-19-between-a-paradox-and-a-hard-place-136418>

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/10/30/the-challenges-of-contact-tracing-as-u-s-battles-covid-19/pi_2020-10-30_contact-tracing-00-05/

Week 12 (11/30) Vaccine equity

- Sallam, M. COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Worldwide: A Concise Systematic Review of Vaccine Acceptance Rates. *Vaccines* 160. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390%2Fvaccines9020160>

- Khan, M., S. A Mohsin Ali, A. Adeline, and A. Karan. [Rethinking Vaccine Hesitancy Among Minority Groups](#). *The Lancet* 397(10288): p 1863-1865.
- Summers, J. (2021). Little Difference in Vaccine Hesitancy among White and Black Americans, Poll Finds. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/03/12/976172586/little-difference-in-vaccine-hesitancy-among-white-and-black-americans-poll-find>
- Choi, K., P. Denice, M. 2021. **Even with equal vaccination rates, COVID-19 hotspots still have higher infection rates.** *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/even-with-equal-vaccination-rates-covid-19-hotspots-still-have-higher-infection-rates-164059>

Week 13 (12/6). Policies and conclusion

- Hsiang, S. et al. (2020). Hsiang, S., Allen, D., Annan-Phan, S. *et al.* [The effect of large-scale anti-contagion policies on the COVID-19 pandemic](#). *Nature* (2020).

Due date: Legal brief.

Take-home exam essay will be announced. Due date: End date of final exam period dictated by Registrar's Office.