

Health

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topics of health and medicine, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Health
2. Medicine and Socialized Medicine

1. HEALTH

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. For instance, you can be healthy physically, but you might be depressed and therefore not healthy by this definition. You need the complete picture to be considered healthy.

Holistic medicine, for example, is a branch that emphasizes the preventative management of both physical and mental health—it focuses on the notion that all aspects of health need to be considered.

How do sociologists study health? Sociologists who study health and medicine will pay particular attention to **social epidemiology**. Epidemiology is the study of how various diseases on the one hand, and good health on the other, are distributed throughout a population. In the United States, there are inequalities in the enjoyment of health and in the negative experience of disease, which are issues that a social epidemiologist would study.

➦ **EXAMPLE** In the U.S., there are poor people and rich people, white people, Hispanic people, black people, etc. Someone concerned with social epidemiology would ask, “How are diseases on one hand, and good health on the other, distributed throughout this population? How are different categories of people affected by patterns of disease and patterns of good health? What are the social or demographic indicators that predict whether someone will have good health or bad health?”

IN CONTEXT

It is interesting to note that poor people are disproportionately suffering from diseases, especially in the American South.

In a recent New York Times article focusing on social epidemiology, it discussed America's third world communities that are near the Mexican border and argued that these poor people, who are living near the threshold of poverty in these communities, are suffering from diseases that were

typically seen only in the third world and have largely been eradicated in American society as a whole. Yet these diseases are coming back in these poor areas.



HINT

You might be thinking that this sounds like social conflict theory, and you'd be correct. Social conflict theory is helpful in understanding the dynamics of health care in American society and the inequalities in social epidemiology, as well as the care, treatment, and medicine inequalities. It helps to illustrate that poor people lack the material resources needed to combat disease in the way that rich people can.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Wealthy people can use their influence to make sure that a landfill--whose garbage might seep into the water table--is not put up in their backyard. They can fight these things, and they often have health insurance, whereas poor people often don't have health insurance.



TERMS TO KNOW

Health

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

Holistic Medicine

A type of health care that asserts that all aspects of a person's well-being should be considered in a preventative approach to health management.

Social Epidemiology

Study of how various diseases on the one hand, and good health on the other, are distributed throughout a population.

2. MEDICINE AND SOCIALIZED MEDICINE

It follows that there can be inequality with respect to disease in society, even in **medicine** and treatment as well. In America, there is inequality with respect to who can get treatment and what kinds of treatment each person can get in this country. Medicine is the social institution that focuses on the treatment and prevention of illness in society. In the U.S., wealth also affects who can and can't get treatment, because America does not have a socialized system of medicine or government-operated health care.

Socialized medicine is available to everyone at limited or no cost, and people can't be excluded because they have pre-existing conditions or a low level of income. Without socialized medicine, people are sometimes poor because they have gotten sick without having health care, and they become saddled with tons of debt because of the medical costs involved with the treatment needed to save or prolong their life. In a socialized system of medicine, this would not happen.

Without socialized medicine, what society is essentially saying is that the life of a poor person is not as valuable or as important as the life of a wealthy person. Other countries just as developed and advanced as the United States have socialized medicine--Sweden has it, as do Norway and Canada. Most countries of similar economic standing to the U.S. have socialized medicine, but the U.S. does not have the political climate to support it.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Consider the debates surrounding Obamacare and how tough it has been to get even

moderate provisions to health care passed.



TERMS TO KNOW

Medicine

A social institution that focuses on the treatment and prevention of illness.

Socialized Medicine

Government owned and operated health care.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **health** and how social conflict theory helps to make sense of the dynamics of health care in American society. You also learned about the inequalities in people's access to medicine and treatment in the U.S., by exploring the areas of **medicine** and **socialized medicine**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



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