

Sociology of Health and Illness (K001002)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 1) English Gent excursion
lecture

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Delaruelle, Katrijn PS04 lecturer-in-charge
Devos, Sarah PS04 co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Master of Science in Teaching in Social Sciences(main subject Sociology)	5	A
Master of Science in Sociology	5	A
Master of Science in Sociology	5	A
Exchange Programme in Political and Social Sciences	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Sociology, health, health inequality, healthcare, medicalization

Position of the course

This course introduces the sociological perspective on health. Using a macro-level approach, we examine how illness and health evolve over time, differ across countries, and are shaped by processes of social stratification. The focus is on the fundamental causes of illness and health.

Contents

Students are introduced to key concepts, theories, and empirical findings in the sociology of health. Throughout the course, the distinctive features of the sociological approach are explicitly highlighted.

We begin by delineating the scope of the sociology of health and illness and examining how a sociological perspective differs from other approaches, such as the biomedical and evolutionary models. This comparison clarifies the epistemological and analytical foundations that characterize sociological inquiry. We then turn to the concept of medicalization, a historical process that shapes how societies define illness and health. Next, we analyse how health-care systems, demographic developments, and processes of social stratification –including socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic/racial stratification– contribute to the production and reproduction of health and health inequalities. This analysis demonstrates how health is embedded within broader social structures and dynamics, both within and beyond the health-care system.

We also address the importance of a life-course perspective, which conceptualizes health as a dynamic process that unfolds over time and is continually shaped by historical and social contexts.

The course concludes with a thematic session in which different insights are applied to the topic of the end of life.

Initial competences

Having successfully completed the course Sociology, or having acquired the

intended competencies in another way.

Final competences

After completing this course unit, students will be able to:

- Explain what a sociological perspective on health entails and how it differs from other perspectives.
- Critically reflect on contemporary ways in which health is understood and problematized.
- Identify how social factors within and beyond the health-care system shape health and health inequalities, and illustrate this with examples.
- Explain how a life-course perspective provides insight into the dynamic nature of health.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Excursion, Lecture

Extra information on the teaching methods

Most lectures are taught by the (co-)lecturer, but for several topics we also invite guest speakers whose research expertise closely aligns with the themes of the course. In addition to the lectures, students participate in an excursion to a healthcare organization, where we observe how health is shaped, organized, and negotiated in everyday practice. Students enrolled in the

For whom are recordings available?

Lecture recordings are available to specific categories of students with a verifiable need. The recordings are available shortly after the lecture and remain accessible until the following weekend.

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: Articles Sociology of Health and Illness

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

Online Available : Yes

Available in the Library : No

Type: Slides

Name: Slides Sociology of Health and Illness

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

Online Available : Yes

Available in the Library : No

References

Examples of references (annually updated list):

- Barrett, R., Kuzawa, C. W., McDade, T., and Armelagos, G. J. (1998). Emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases: The third epidemiologic transition. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27, 247-271.
- Link, B.G. & Phelan, J.C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363-385.
- Deaton, A. (2002). Policy implications of the gradient of health and wealth. *Health Affairs*, 21, 48-59
- Parsons, T. (1964). *Social structure and personality*. Collier Macmillan, London.
- Bracke, P., Delaruelle, K., Dereuddre, R., & Van de Velde, S. (2020). Depression in women and men, cumulative disadvantage and gender inequality in 29 European countries. *Social Science & Medicine*, 267, 113354.
- De Prez, V., Jolidon, V., Willems, B., Cullati, S., Burton-Jeangros, C., & Bracke, P. (2020). Cervical cancer (over) screening in Belgium and Switzerland: trends

and social inequalities. *European journal of public health*, 30(3), 552-557.

- Burton-Jeangros, C. (2020). Life Course Approaches in Global Health. In Haring, R. et al. (Ed.) *Handbook of Global Health* (pp. 1-28). Cham: Springer.

Course content-related study coaching

By appointment

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment, Written assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment, Written assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

Written and oral exam

For Erasmus students who need to retake the exam, an alternative exam format is possible if certain conditions are met. This must be discussed with the lecturer after they receive their score from the first exam period.

Calculation of the examination mark

Periodic assessment (100%)

Facilities for Working Students

This course is accessible to working students. Lecture recordings are available for a limited time, and only the excursion requires mandatory attendance.