

Illness, Culture and Society (SA)

Sociology and Anthropology 218

Section: D100

Term: 2003 Fall

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Discussion Topics: Our most basic and cherished right is to live a healthy life. Yet this right has been trampled in an age of affluence and advanced health technology. How is it that majority of the people in the world are denied the right to lead a healthy life? What are the factors at work that make the sick and the poor bear the brunt of human rights violations? How does the work of international aid agencies impact on public health and access to medical care? What is the relationship between individualist notions of health and institutional underpinnings? What role does anthropology play in unmasking the causes of human suffering?

In this course we will explore these questions in relation to the premise that violations of human rights and their impact on human health are a function of social and economic conditions. The following themes will guide our discussion: (a) social construction of health and illness; (b) political economy of relief work; (c) public health and access to medical care (d) strategies of resistance in scholarship, pedagogy and grassroots movements.

This course provides new insights into these themes from a medical anthropological and comparative perspective on health and human rights. First we will explore health differences among social groups and between societies. We then turn to more specific models for thinking about health socially and contextually. Through case studies we show how local and global inequalities lead to disparities and deprivation for the majority. The course closely analyses communities located on the margins of society. We consider intersections of inequality that impact the health of racialized minority women and men (including aging and disability). We will carefully examine case studies in order to critically reassess conventional views of human rights. The substantive theme here is to document the links between health, human rights and unequal relations of power. We ask how poverty (relative and extreme), racial and gender inequalities affect the dynamics of human rights and identify ways in which variations of these affect those who are excluded by the system. We will also examine the work of international aid organizations to explore the contentious issue: does such aid help people or does it perpetuate structural violence? Answer to this and other questions calls for critical scholarship and emancipatory knowledge.

At the end of the course, we should have developed a broader understanding of corporate global capitalism and the political economy of suffering. If indeed human rights and health have moved into center space, I hope that this course will provide us with some understanding

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of their meaning and implications globally.

This course has a seminar/lecture format. Students are required to participate and lead class/group discussions. Throughout the course, students will have the opportunity to explore subjects of interest to them.

All students are required to have an SFU e-mail account.

Grading: Book/Articles Review: 20%

Group Assignments: 20%

Class Participation: 20%

Semester Paper: 40%

All the assignments in this course must be completed for a final grade to be assigned.

Required Texts: Paul Farmer.(2003) Pathologies of Power: Health Human Rights and the New War on the Poor. University of California.

Yasmin Jiwani. (2001) Intersecting Inequalities: Immigrant Women of Colour, Violence and Health Care. Fre

Recommended Texts: Veena Das et al. (2002) Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery. University of California.

L. Mehl-Madrona. (2003) Coyote Medicine: Lesson from Native American Healing. Simon & Schuster.

Materials/Supplies: None

Prerequisite/Corequisite: SA 101 or 201 or 150. Students with credit SA 460 when offered as Medical Anthropology may not take SA 218 for further credit.

Notes: The course instructor reserves the right to check for plagiarism using software provided by the SFU administration for this purpose.

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