

Demography of Health/Mortality Specialization Exam  
Fall, 2007 - Day Two

Instructions: Please answer 1 question in each of the three groups below. You have 4 hours to complete the exam. Best of luck!

Group One

1. In the U.S., women report worse health than men, yet they live longer. What might explain this gender paradox in health? Discuss explanations and the evidence for them.
2. Do neighborhoods influence the physical health and mortality of residents who live there? What, specifically, about neighborhoods affects health? What types of studies are needed to answer the question of whether neighborhoods affect health over and above the characteristics of the individuals who live in the neighborhoods? If neighborhood characteristics affect physical health, why do they; that is, what are the mediators?

Group Two

1. What is "mortality selection?" To what extent do you think mortality selection impacts empirical findings in the study of adult mortality and health outcomes? What are one or two ways in which mortality selection might be able to be taken into account in empirical work when modeling adult health or mortality in the United States?
2. What are the most pressing research issues in the study of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic differences in U.S. health and mortality? To best address this question, you might wish to review of the recent key findings in this area, and then discuss ideas for future work that would help to fill in some of the key gaps.

Group Three

1. Colgrove (2002 AJPH) argues that McKeown's thesis -- that dramatic reductions in mortality over the past two centuries were due to improved socioeconomic conditions rather than to medical or public health interventions -- has been "overturned" and his theory "discredited." Yet, one of the underlying premises of much of the research on inequality in mortality rests on Link and Phelan's argument that socioeconomic conditions represent the fundamental causes of disease. Critically evaluate Colgrove's argument in light of the empirical evidence and theoretical framework offered by Link and Phelan.
2. What is meant by the rectangularization (or curve-squaring) of mortality? Critically discuss the assumptions of the rectangularization argument: 1) that there is a biologically ordained limit to the life span, 2) that we are rapidly approaching that limit, and 3) that the health of the elderly is improving.