



## Study Guide: Health Disparities

### Issues and questions

Thus far, you have been given an overview of the social determinants of health and major public health challenges, and a brief introduction to Health Impact Assessment as a tool for promoting health in all policies. Today's class examines health disparities. Broadly, we are interested in understanding how health disparities are defined and studied, prominent health problems experienced domestically and globally, and arguments for and against addressing health inequalities.

We use **Beauchamp's** *Public Health as Social Justice* as a launching pad for understanding the core principles that govern public health research and practice. **Sen's** piece builds on this work by suggesting that health plays an important role in human life and freedom, and emphasizing that health equity is embedded in our larger understanding of justice.

**Marmot and colleagues** provide an overview of current health disparities, including a synopsis of evidence pointing to inequalities in health. Furthermore, **Arcaya et al.** synthesize pivotal works in public health literature, giving us an overview of how health inequities are commonly studied, the theoretical frameworks used to explain group level differences, and concepts that are vital to comprehending health inequalities and the merits of different policy approaches.

### Questions

1. According to **Beauchamp**, what is social justice and why is it so hard to achieve? How does market justice undermine efforts to minimize death and disability? What counter argument does social justice provide?
2. **Sen** and **Arcaya et al.** both discuss the differences between health equity and health inequality. How are these concepts differentiated? Why does **Sen** believe we should concentrate on health equity as a policy issue? What are some arguments against this approach?
3. Public health practitioners focus on health at the group level. According to **Arcaya et al.**, how are social groups defined and what are some of the challenges to establishing definitions?
4. Social determinants of health are "the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life."<sup>1</sup> Public Health is interested in understanding the pathways through which social determinants affect health. According to **Arcaya et al.**, what is the difference between a mediator and a modifier? Can you think of some ways to illustrate the effects of these?
5. **Marmot et al.** provide an overview of health disparities. Among other topics, this piece addresses

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)



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the challenges of material deprivation and the social gradient. We also discussed this issue in class. How are these two concepts illustrated? (i.e. What is the social gradient? What is material deprivation? And under what contexts are each prominent?)

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