An overview of the link between social inequality and emotional inequality, focusing on differences in mental health across social groups and the role of stress and coping resources in explaining group differences.

Prerequisite

The prerequisite for Sociology 363 is either a Sociology 200 level or higher course or a Psychology 200 level or higher course. Students without the prerequisite will be removed from the course when discovered.

Overview

This course considers the influence of social environment and social experience on mental distress and disorder, focusing especially on differences in mental health by social statuses and across groups, and explanations of these differences both in terms of the exposure to different types of stress and access to social and/or personal coping resources.

The course can be viewed as a logical sequence of issues that arise in considering the experiential course of a person at risk for mental health problems. We begin with the problem of defining and measuring disorder and distress, and then consider variations in mental health that are related to social position or category, such as social class, gender, race, and marital status. The course then uses the Stress Process model as an organizing framework for explaining the role of social inequality and social experience in mental health. This section introduces the basic components of this model, with an emphasis on varieties of stressors and coping resources. Given a person with a mental health problem,
then, the next section considers the life consequences of these problems, focusing as examples on educational marriage, and adult achievement outcomes. Finally, we consider important themes in recent mental health research, focusing on the life course perspective, the impact of social contexts such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and communities, and the impact of macro-stressful events, such as 9/11 and school shootings.

My approach in this course is to consider the better-known and/or most prevalent disorders and problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse in particular. We do not restrict our attention to disorders, however. A good deal of the important variation in mental health is not captured by considering only those with a disorder vs. all others. I will discuss mental health issues in terms of a gradient of problems from the minor to the severe, thus including those with real problems but who do not qualify for specific diagnoses. Studying the full range of mental health is important to a sociological approach, since the full distribution of mental health is a sensitive indicator of sources of social disadvantage and inequality.

**Required Work**

I will give one term test (all short-answer) and a final exam, both short-answer. Term work will include either a short paper (4 to 6 pages double-spaced) handed in by the due date in class or a series of comments on readings that you post online on the dates readings are assigned for class. Note that the test and the final are non-cumulative.

The short-answer sections of tests are somewhat unique in format. Basically, types of responses vary by the type of question. Some questions are multiple choice, some are fill-in-the-blank, some ask you to choose the correct word to complete a sentence, and some require a phrase or sentence response. Questions focus on evaluating your awareness and understanding of the basic theories, concepts, hypotheses, and findings discussed in both readings and lectures. No short-answer questions necessitating an “opinion” to be defended will be included.

**Paper**

This paper will be a response to the three questions below. The purpose of the paper is to apply concepts and theories discussed in the course. This paper will be a case study of someone you know, using course concepts and findings to help explain their emotional or psychological problems, or alternatively, to help explain why they do not have problems given a high-risk life history. The anonymity of the person should be protected. Your current knowledge of the person and their life circumstances must be sufficient to write the paper.

In the course of the paper, you will answer the following three questions:

1. **Give a short history of the problem, or circumstances that could have led to a problem, including important circumstances that must be included to answer questions #2 and #3. Discuss the specific content of the problem,**
relating it to known criteria for disorder or distress. Also briefly discuss, if appropriate, issues of duration of symptoms, timing in the life course, and severity. This question must be answered in one page or less.

2. Comment on the specific risk for these problems suggested by findings on the social distribution of mental health from the course. Does your case fit these findings or not, and if not, suggest a reason? Answer this part in 1 to 2 pages. You can discuss other risk factors beyond those discussed in the course if you cite supporting literature.

3. Discuss the role of social statuses, stress exposures and coping resources in explaining the development of their problem and whether the problem has diminished or grown over time (if applicable). It is important here that you focus only on what you argue are the “crucial” stressors or coping resource problems that explain why the problem occurred when it occurred, and how it was maintained over time. If you choose to analyze someone who has avoided mental health problems despite stress, present why you think the stressors they have experienced are important and how their coping resources helped avoid problems. Answer this question in 3 to 4 pages.

Comments

If you choose not to write a paper, you have the alternative of posting comments on Blackboard on 6 of 9 selected readings. The readings you can select from are highlighted in the reading list and you must post your comments prior to class on the day that reading is discussed in class.

Comments are broadly defined as either analytical questions or a commentary about the interpretation of ideas or findings in the paper that raise critical issues about the paper, connect it with other readings, or explain its role as an important contribution to the literature. These comments should mention the parts of the paper that led to the comment you make, but you also need to be clear that you have read the entire paper. Each comment you submit should be about half to three-quarters of a page single-spaced. You will upload these comments to a private “Journals” section of Blackboard.

Due Dates for Work:

You will have to declare whether you intend to write a paper or submit commentaries by the week before the first test. Provisional due dates for required work are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Term test</td>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Either: Paper</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Or: 6 Comments on readings</td>
<td>exam period</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Final exam</td>
<td>exam period</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Please note: Late papers will be given a 10% reduction in the grade immediately. This increases to 20% if the paper is late more than 4 days. Papers will not be accepted if they are more than a week late. Your grade will be zero on that part of the course. There are no late comments: any comment posted late will not be graded.
**Blackboard**

Blackboard will be used in this course primarily for three purposes: 1) I will post required readings beyond the textbook there; 2) You will post comments about readings on the discussion board; and 3) I will post most lecture Power Point materials there.

**Textbook (required)**


**Class Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Section / Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 6</td>
<td>1. Sociological Approach</td>
<td>Thoits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wheaton</td>
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<td>January 13</td>
<td>2.1 and 2.2 Definition and Measurement</td>
<td>Wakefield</td>
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<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Wheaton</td>
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<td>January 20</td>
<td>3.1 Patterns</td>
<td>Kessler (all 3)</td>
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<td>3.2 Social Class</td>
<td>Eaton</td>
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<td>January 27</td>
<td>3.3 Gender</td>
<td>Rosenfield and Smith</td>
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<td>3.4 Marital Status</td>
<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Williams et al. Simon</td>
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<td>February 3</td>
<td>3.5 Race, Immigration</td>
<td>Williams</td>
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<td>Montazer and Wheaton</td>
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<td>February 10</td>
<td><em>Term Test</em></td>
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<td>February 24</td>
<td>4.1 and 4.2 Stress Models</td>
<td>Pearlin</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wheaton and Montazer</td>
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<td>March 3</td>
<td>4.2 and 4.3 Stress and Coping</td>
<td>Turner and Brown</td>
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<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Ross and Mirowsky</td>
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<td>March 10</td>
<td>5.1 Life Consequences</td>
<td>Breslau</td>
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<td>Kessler</td>
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<td>March 17</td>
<td>5.2 Neighbourhoods</td>
<td>Aneshensel</td>
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<td>Leventhal</td>
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<td>March 24</td>
<td>5.3 The Life Course</td>
<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Elder and Liker</td>
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**Student Accommodations**

Please see me if you have a disability or other need that requires accommodation or classroom modification. I will be glad to help you in whatever way I can.

**Missed Deadlines**

Medical Issues: Please note that requests for medically based exemptions for the assignment deadline must be accompanied by a U. of T. medical form, signed in legible handwriting and completely filled out with address and CPSO registration number. The original form must be given to me in person, within 7 business days, with the opportunity for me to make a Xerox copy.

Forms that are scanned or Xeroxed will not be accepted. The U. of T medical form is available from [www.healthservice.utoronto.ca/pdfs/medcert.htm](http://www.healthservice.utoronto.ca/pdfs/medcert.htm)

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to know and adhere to the University's principles of academic integrity. Any act of plagiarism or other unethical behavior will be addressed in accordance with University guidelines. Students should be aware that turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second course, is considered an academic offense. Please see the "Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters" ([http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm](http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm)) for specific information on academic integrity at the U of T.

**Appointments**

I do not hold specific office hours. Instead, you can phone the number on the first page and arrange an appointment at any time, or email me to set up an appointment. I am in my office on most days.
TOPICS/READING LIST

1. THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH.


2. DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT OF MENTAL DISORDER AND DISTRESS

2.1 Definition and Measurement of Mental Disorder.


2.2 Psychological Distress and its Relation to Disorder.


3. THE SOCIAL DISTRIBUTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

3.1 Epidemiological Patterns


3.2 Social Class.


3.3 Gender


3.4 Family Structure and Marital Status


3.5 Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration


4. EXPLANATIONS OF SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

4.1 The Stress Process Model

**4.2 Stress Models**

**4.3 Coping Resources and Coping Behavior.**


**5. SPECIAL TOPICS**

**5.1 Life Consequences Of Mental Health Problems**


**5.2 Neighbourhoods as Social Contexts**


5.3 The Life Course


5.4 Terrorism and Macro-Stress