The CHRS weekly seminar series discusses critical issues in the application of social science perspectives on health. It covers cross-disciplinary topics and features AU-based and outside speakers giving presentations, "work in progress" seminars, methods overview seminars, and thematic seminars.

This year’s thematic seminars focus on topics related to on-going CHRS working groups: Community Disruption and Health; Global Health Governance; and Social Determinants and Structural Interventions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE SERIES OR WORKING GROUPS, CONTACT CHRS@american.edu

September 16 – FALL 2015 WELCOME
NO SPEAKER. Join us as we welcome new members of the AU community interested in CHRS-related topics and say hello to old friends.

September 23
Robin Lumsdaine, PhD, Professor, Department of Finance and Real Estate, Crown Prince of Bahrain Chair in International Finance, Kogod School of Business, American University

"Cross-national comparisons and engaging undergraduates in research: An overview of recent projects (aka ‘How I spent my sabbatical’)"
Abstract: This seminar provides an overview of my current research projects using a variety of international longitudinal datasets: the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS). These projects were developed during my recent sabbatical that included time in residence with both the HRS and SHARE teams (at the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research and the Max Planck Institut fur Sozialrecht und Sozialpolitik, respectively). It will also include a discussion of the ways I have engaged undergraduates in research using these very important datasets.

September 30 – Co-sponsored with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars Program
Dorothy M. Daley, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs & Administration and Environmental Studies Program, University of Kansas and Kim M. Blankenship, PhD, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology, and Director, Center on Health, Risk and Society, American University

“Rewards, risks and challenges of multidisciplinary centers and associations in universities”
Abstract: Speakers will talk for 10-15 minutes regarding their experiences with leading multidisciplinary centers and associations. As leaders of such centers, they will discuss some of the challenges and risks of multidisciplinary centers/associations, along with the rewards, and also share the perspectives of affiliated faculty and graduate students. This will also be an opportunity to learn more about the new Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science.

October 7 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Randa B. Serhan, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, American University

“Suspended community: The making of Palestinians in America”
Abstract: In keeping with the CHRS interest in community disruption and change, this presentation will be based on the introduction to the manuscript I am preparing entitled, Suspended Community, which is an account of how a Palestinian American community in metropolitan New York resolves the dilemma and tensions inherent in being Palestinian and American in a milieu that has favored Israel since 1967 and further marginalized the community in the post-9/11 era. The talk is based on a 7-year ethnographic study.

October 14 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Work in Progress
Rita Jalali, PhD, Scholar in Residence, Department of Sociology, American University

“The Impact of water, sanitation, and hygiene insecurities on health: A gender framework”
Abstract: The presentation will provide a conceptual framework for understanding water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) related diseases from a gender perspective. A gendered approach to diseases has been developed by many researchers before, but it has not been applied to the WASH sector comprehensively. The paper will focus on infectious and non-infectious diseases; adopt a life cycle approach that goes beyond maternal health to include the burden on non-pregnant women and girls; and examine other dimensions of WASH deprivation that have been neglected. The objective is to highlight how WASH insecurities impact men and women differently. The framework is based on research from the fields of public health, medicine, and social science and also insights gained from recent fieldwork in rural Bihar, India.

October 21 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Adrienne Pine, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, American University
“Environmental racism and healthcare solidarity on the Rez”

Abstract: This August, toxic waste from a long-closed Colorado gold mine destroyed the water supply for tens of thousands of Navajo residents in three states, turning the Animas and San Juan rivers bright orange. This tragedy, which Navajos articulate in the language of trauma, compounds centuries of colonial, genocidal and ecological violence that is also visible in the ubiquitous uranium tailings, fracking flares, and missile factories on the reservation. Native Americans are struggling to cope with the high rates of cancer and other illnesses directly resulting from the various forms of capitalist extractive violence to which they have been subjected for generations. Meanwhile, native healthcare providers struggle to staff their hospitals and clinics and provide appropriate care under threat of closure by the Indian Health Service. In this talk, I will discuss my new solidarity research alongside Navajo healthcare providers, and explore their visions of a radically different future.

October 28 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Work in Progress
Laura Jung, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, American University
“Unintended Consequences: The Effects of Short-Term Medical Missions on Health Outcomes”

Abstract: What are the effects of short-term medical missions (STMMs) on health outcomes in rural communities? I conducted 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in rural Honduras to answer this question. This talk is based on a chapter of my dissertation, which examines anonymized medical records from a series of STMMs and a local health center to understand the kind of treatment provided to patients in the same site and ascertain the effect of this treatment on patients. I also incorporate ethnographic data collected through participant observation, participant journals, and interviews about the perceived effects of both STMM and local health center interventions in health. The data suggest that while STMMs may save lives in rare instances, they make little impact on long-term health and sometimes cause medical complications for patients receiving regular care for complex illnesses at their local health center. I examine the consequences of these findings and suggest ways to improve health and health outcomes in rural communities.

November 4 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Work in Progress
Lauren Carruth, PhD, Assistant Professor, School of International Service, American University
“Local staff, global aid: Humanitarian work in the Somali region of Ethiopia”

Abstract: This project uses ethnography with Somalis in Ethiopia to explore the lives and livelihoods of local staff in the global humanitarian aid industry. Scholarly and popular literatures abound with analyses and exposés of the lives of expatriate aid workers, volunteers, missionaries, and the organizations with which these individuals affiliate. But the majority of people responding to conflicts, disasters, and epidemics around the world, in fact, are not parachuting in from afar, but instead live and work nearby. They are locals: language translators, drivers, survey administrators, community health workers, manual laborers, and experts on and brokers of local “culture.” Local staffers actualize global humanitarian missions. But their contributions are often hidden or taken for granted. Moreover, I find the benefits and struggles local staffers face remain absent from the planning and evaluations of humanitarian interventions. I have spent the last eight years engaged in ethnographic study of the lives of Somalis, aid workers, and healthcare providers in Ethiopia, as well as the local economies and moralities produced through humanitarian engagement. I argue in Local Staff, Global Aid that the invisibility of local aid work is the product of economic exploitation and marginalization within the global humanitarian industry.

November 11 – THEMATIC SEMINAR
Sanyu A. Mojola, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Colorado-Boulder
“Race, health and inequality: Producing an HIV epidemic in the shadow of the capitol”

Abstract: Racial health disparities are among the most intransigent and enduring markers of inequality in the United States. Blacks in the U.S. have higher rates of illness and death compared to other race/ethnic groups, and these disparities have persisted for decades. Drawing on life history and key informant interviews as well as a variety of contemporary and archival sources, this presentation will examine the unique configuration of social-structural and demographic processes which came together to produce disproportionate and persistent health vulnerability for African Americans. Specifically focusing on the case of the Washington D.C. HIV epidemic, the presentation explores the combined and contingent roles of migration, racial residential segregation, concentrated poverty, drug epidemics, the War on Drugs, and mass incarceration in shaping individual HIV vulnerability. Respondent life histories are woven throughout the presentation to illustrate how these larger social structural processes came to shape their individual choices, HIV acquisition, and their lives following diagnosis as they transitioned to older ages.

November 18
Work in Progress
Bart Bingenheimer, Associate Professor, Department of Prevention and Community Health, Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University

Abstract: Adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa face numerous risks to their sexual and reproductive health, including HIV, other STIs, and unintended pregnancy and the consequences thereof. Interventions to reduce these risks have taken a variety of forms and yielded mixed, but mostly disappointing, results. In this project we propose to design a new intervention for adolescent girls that builds upon the Population Council’s Safe Spaces model and incorporates insights from the Positive Youth Development framework as well as our own prior longitudinal study of the gendered social contexts of adolescent sexual risk behaviors in Ghana. We also propose to measure the impact and cost-effectiveness of the intervention via a cluster randomized trial with three-year pregnancy incidence as the primary endpoint. The proposal was reviewed by study section at NIH in Cycle 2 of 2015 but did not earn a priority score. In this work in progress seminar I’d like to get feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, ideas for addressing the weaknesses, and suggestions for moving the work forward.

December 2
TBD