Epidemiological Methods for Documenting Human Rights Abuses

Room: 60 Haven B2 Conference room
Tuesdays: 5:30 – 8:20PM  Oct. 23\textsuperscript{rd} – Dec. 4\textsuperscript{th}

INSTRUCTOR

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Office hours by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The occurrence of murder, disappearances, and rape are common during complex emergencies and yet the rate of these events is rarely measured while the conflict is ongoing. In some cases, groups are denied life-sustaining services because of race, politics, or HIV status. Public health practitioners are uniquely situated and qualified to advocate for populations whose human rights and survival are threatened by the intentional actions of organized groups. This class will teach students techniques for detecting and estimating the rates of these major abuses of human rights in order to better advocate for the abused, and to permit the evaluation of programs designed to prevent such events. At the end of the course, students will be expected to be able to evaluate the sensitivity of surveillance systems, and undertake surveys, designed to measure the rates of violent deaths and rape. Classes will involve a combination of lectures, case studies, and a research project ending with a debate. Students will be evaluated based on class participation, a presentation and a paper.

PREREQUISITES

Students should have completed relevant classes in Epidemiology and (Bio)Statistics (or equivalent)

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Describe and know the limitations of the basic survey and surveillance techniques utilized to document the rates of rape and murder.
- Evaluate the sensitivity of a surveillance system designed to detect episodes of rape or murder.
- Conduct a capture-recapture analysis from multiple lists of documented events.
• Monitor rates of murder or rape over time during a protracted complex emergency situation.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING POLICY

Student grades will be based on:

Class participation..........................................................50%
Project participation and short paper...................................50%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to keep up with readings, attend class and participate on a regular basis. All assignments are to be submitted on time unless there is a documented compelling health or personal problem.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course will be a combination of lecture and case-study.

MAILMAN SCHOOL POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Students and faculty have a shared commitment to the School’s mission, values and oath. http://mailman.columbia.edu/about-us/school-mission/

Academic Integrity

Students are required to adhere to the Mailman School Honor Code, available online at http://mailman.columbia.edu/honorcode.

Disability Access

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Students who have, or think they may have a disability are invited to contact ODS for a confidential discussion at 212.854.2388 (V) 212.854.2378 (TTY), or by email at disability@columbia.edu. If you have already registered with ODS, please speak to your instructor to ensure that s/he has been notified of your recommended accommodations by Lillian Morales (lm31@columbia.edu), the School’s liaison to the Office of Disability Services.
### Session 1 – Overview of Public Health Information use in IHL and Human Rights Promotion

| Oct. 23rd | Learning Objectives: An overview of past convictions & indictments based on health-related data will be presented. Class will struggle with what defines a systematic human rights problem and the role of the Public Health community in addressing such problems. The class options for doing a project or a paper will be discussed.  

Case study: Birth Defects in Iraq, 2014.  

Required Reading: None  

Recommended Readings:  
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Skim) |

Jan. 24  No class: school-wide teach-in.

### Session 2 – Documenting Rape: Surveys

| Oct. 30th | Learning Objectives: Overview of literature on estimations of rape.  

A summary of the methods and difficulties of documenting this difficult topic will be presented. Two studies conducted by the Forced Migration Program will be reviewed.  

Required readings:  
Nov. 6th **Election day – No classes**

**Session 3 – Documenting Deaths**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nov. 13th</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Objectives:</strong> students will be able to highlight the history of attempts to document deaths in times of conflict and the basic approaches for doing so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A summary of past attempts to estimate mortality will be presented.</td>
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<td>Case study on forced displacement in Zimbabwe.</td>
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**Readings**

Session 4 – Documenting death: The special cases of Syria and Iraq

Learning Objectives: Students will gain insight into the unique problems of communication of mortality data from the war in Iraq.

A summary will be presented of the various efforts to measure mortality in Iraq and the systematic process by which incomplete surveillance efforts have become the dominant source cited in the press.

Readings:


Recommended reading if you have the time:

- Les Roberts. “Iraq’s death toll is far worse than our leaders admit.” *The Independent*. Published: 14 February 2007 [http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/article2268067.ece]


- How Syrians are being Killed. [http://www.irinnews.org/maps-and-graphics/2016/07/25/how-syrians-are-being-killed]

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**Session 5 – Other difficult to measure issues: snowball sampling and respondent driven sampling**

**Learning Objectives**: The problems associated with recording and documenting the effects of murder, human trafficking, and immigrant vulnerability and other situations with difficult to identify denominators will be discussed.

**Reading**:


Recommended reading:

- Leslie Roberts (No, a different one!!!!!) A war within a war.

Similar articles if you are looking for them later:


Session 6 – Past Student Project, The Disappearance of Native American Women

**Learning Objectives:** Review a series of approaches past classes have employed

Other techniques and past projects by students covering a variety of techniques will be discussed.

**Readings:**

- *Henderson et al. "Reporting on deaths in Iraq." Conflict and Health 2009, 3:9*
- Carpenter D, Fuller T, Roberts L. WikiLeaks, and Iraq Body Count, the Sum of Parts may not Add Up to the Whole. A Comparison of two tallies of Iraqi Civilian Deaths. In preparation.
• Zradavec F et al. Gender and unaccompanied ridership late at night in New York Subways. In preparation.

Before class, please consider watching: