

MARX AND HEALTH: SOCIAL EPIDEMIOLOGY'S INEXORABLE MARCH TOWARDS EVIDENCE—BASED POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Marx said in the Communist Manifesto, "...society mediates between production and consumption in the form of general, dominant determinants; in exchange the two are mediated by the chance characteristics of the individual." This analysis is clearly applicable to health, given its fundamental role in human endeavour, and the current, almost universal, commoditisation of health care.

Epidemiology is a branch of medicine demonstrating associations and/or causal relationships between risk/protective factors and adverse outcomes, and providing reliable evidence for favouring one intervention over another. Meta—analyses, or combining the results/datasets of several equally—rigorous studies, form the basis of the 'evidence—based' medicine.

Social epidemiology seeks to uncover the social determinants of health. Distinct from a strictly biomedical focus, social epidemiologists have developed a conceptual framework for investigating the influence of social context on community wellbeing. Theoretical and empirical evidence exists for an elaborated bio—psycho—social concept of health that takes account of the dynamic interaction between the individual human and their environment. This encompasses macroeconomic factors such as income distribution, and features of social relationships, such as social capital and social cohesion. Social epidemiology would therefore seem to provide a fruitful area of enquiry to improve the emancipatory paradigm, and facilitate progress towards evidence—based political and social organisation.