Health and Diseases in Past Societies: Using Cause-specific Mortality to Understand Inequalities

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE	LOCATION
27 Aug 2026, 11:00 - 13:30	House 5 SR133
THEME	CONFERENCE
F - Demography and Historiography	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

Mortality is not only a key driver of population dynamics but also a critical indicator of overall health status. High infant and early childhood mortality often reflect inadequate nutrition and poor public health infrastructure, while mortality trends among the elderly can indicate improvements in life expectancy and living conditions. In historical populations, transitions in mortality causes, from infectious to non-communicable diseases, highlight the profound effects of shifting lifestyles, dietary patterns, urbanization, and socio-economic development. Cause-specific mortality offers a powerful lens through which to examine health inequalities in past societies. Patterns of mortality - by age, sex, social status, and place of residence - reveal how biological, environmental, and social factors shaped health outcomes across different historical and cultural settings. This panel aims to explore the multifaceted dimensions of health inequality in past populations by focusing on changes in cause-specific mortality. We invite contributions that investigate how mortality varied with factors such as gender, age, social hierarchy, and urban versus rural residence, and how these differences relate to broader epidemiological, environmental, and cultural transitions. By bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives from human biology, demography, and historical epidemiology, the session seeks to foster dialogue and stimulate new approaches to understanding health disparities in historical contexts.

Participants

Convenor

- Gra?yna Liczbi?ska (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Panelists

- João Rocha Gomes (University of Porto)
- Gra?yna Liczbi?ska (Adam Mickiewicz University)
- Elena Crinela Holom (Centre for Population Studies, Babe ?-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca)
- Catherine Lynda Evina (ELA)
- António Fernandes Gonçalves (Independent Researcher / UMinho)
- Mayra Murkens (Radboud University/Groningen University)
- Sanne Muurling (Radboud University)
- Inês Carrilho (CIES-ISCTE)
- Kristina Thompson (Wageningen University)
- Witold Piniarski (Adam Mickiewicz University)
- Ömer Ünsal (Bursa Uluda? University, Bursa)
- Tomasz Szel?g (Independent Researcher, Pozna?)
- Levente Pakot (Hungarian Central Statistical Office Institute for Quantitative Population and Economic Research)
- Sara Wiertsema (Wageningen University)

Papers

Bridging Past and Present: Re-examining 19th-Century Portuguese Mortality Patterns through Digital Health Perspectives

João Rocha-Gomes (University of Porto)

Spatial distribution and dynamics of the cholera epidemics in 19th-century city of Pozna?

Gra?yna Liczbi?ska (Adam Mickiewicz University), Witold Piniarski (Adam Mickiewicz University), Ömer Ünsal (Bursa Uluda ? University, Bursa), Tomasz Szel?g (Independent Researcher, Pozna?)

Social class differences in cause-specific infant and child mortality. Western Hungary, 1850–1940.

Levente Pakot (Hungarian Central Statistical Office Institute for Quantitative Population and Economic Research), Péter ?ri (Hungarian Central Statistical Office Institute for Quantitative Population and Economic Research)

Early Child Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Pozna?: Causes, Trends, and Urban Ecology

Elena Crinela Holom (Centre for Population Studies, Babe ?-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca), Gra ?yna Liczbi?ska (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Exploring Health Inequalities in Cameroon: A Retrospective Analysis of Cause-Specific Mortality at the Enongal Central Hospital (1975–2023)

Catherine Lynda Evina (ELA)

Pandemic crisis: from the epicenter to the periphery (Portugal). Spread and demographic impact of covid-19: from Vale do Tâmega e Sousa to Vale do Ave.

António Fernandes Gonçalves (Independent Researcher / UMinho)

Understanding Changing Early Child Mortality in Amsterdam during the Epidemiological Transition (1856-1924)

Mayra Murkens (Radboud University/Groningen University), Sanne Muurling (Radboud University)

Maternal Mortality in Late 19th-Century Oporto (Portugal): Causes, Contexts, and Social Determinants.

Inês Carrilho (CIES-ISCTE)

The rise of socio-economic inequities in mortality in the twentieth-century Netherlands: The role of lifestyle-related diseases.

Kristina Thompson (Wageningen University), Sara Wiertsema (Wageningen University)

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