Sociology of Health
General Exam

Please answer one question from each of the following three sections.

Section 1

1. Kitagawa and Hauser were among the earlier users of the concept of “excess mortality”. In 2000, the World Health Organization declared that excess mortality was a serious worldwide problem. Identify excess mortality and discuss the framework within which to consider mortality (or health) in an urban environment. Describe the various pathways through which the urban environment impinges health over time. Provide ways in which the burden of excess mortality can be substantially reduced or eliminated.

2. Continuing as an extremely important issue is the question of the relationship between health and socioeconomic status. Write an essay discussing “what we know and what we don’t know” about the relationship between socioeconomic status and health, concluding with a brief statement of what researchers need or need to do to gain greater insight into this question.

Section 2

3. Mortality rates are subject to bias and error resulting from reporting, classification, and coverage. Studies have documented that these problems are more acute for some population groups than for others. There has been increasing attention paid to issues of validity and reliability concerning mortality data and how they vary across populations. Discuss the main arguments. Include in your answer the ways in which attempts have been made to address these issues.

4. Much of the research literature on social factors and health revolves around mortality as the outcome of interest. With the proper data, researchers who study mortality are able to do so using some form of time-dependent hazards regression modeling. Although mortality is an important topic to study, a variety of other measures related to physical health are also important. For this question, provide a general overview of the other physical health-related concepts (at least three) that are often studied in this literature. For each concept, provide examples of measures that have been used in the past. Finally, discuss why it is important to study these concepts in a longitudinal framework and how you would do so for each of your examples. Be specific in terms of the modeling strategies you would use for each of your examples.

Section 3

5. Recent research has paid increasing attention to the effects of experiences early in life on mortality at adult ages. Discuss these hypotheses and their implications for understanding patterns of decline in mortality in the past and predictions of the future course of mortality.

6. Multi-level studies which examine the effect of contextual (e.g., neighborhood) variables on individual health outcomes are becoming more and more prominent. Some studies report significant contextual effects, net of controls individual-level attributes, but such findings fairly often fail to emerge. Do you think that at this time the literature provides strong empirical support for the importance contextual effects on individual outcomes or not? What leads you to that general conclusion? What are the substantive advantages of multi-level analyses? What are some of limitations, both logical and in regard to data, that complicate attempts to estimate and draw conclusions from multi-level models of health?