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Q7(c)

Describe the scope of Epidemiological Anthropology in the study of infectious and non-infectious diseases.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Epidemiological Anthropology

9.8 Epidemiological Anthropology: Health and disease. Infectious and non-infectious diseases, Nutritional deficiency related diseases.

Core demand of the question

- Describe the scope of Epidemiological Anthropology in the study of infectious and non-infectious diseases
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

The field links disease rates to culture and environment.

Infections follow water, crowding, stigma, and zoonotic edges.

Non-infectious disease follows diet, work, and early-life nutrition.

Kleinman's models explain treatment uptake.

Scope is biosocial explanation for prevention.

Introduction

Epidemiological anthropology studies how culture, ecology, and inequality shape who falls ill. It joins rates to meaning for both infections and chronic disease.

Body**Infectious disease**

- Contact, water, housing, and ritual gathering spread microbes. **John Snow** mapped cholera; anthropology asks why people draw that water.
- **Malaria** and sickle cell, **TB** and crowding, **HIV** and stigma, **COVID** and caste-class space are field topics.
- **McKeown** and later biosocial work show nutrition and sanitation shifting infection long before a new drug in some histories.
- Zoonoses at the forest-farm edge need tribal and market ethnography, not only a lab.

Non-infectious disease

- **Diabetes**, hypertension, and cancer follow diet transition, sitting work, and fetal undernutrition (**Barker**).
- Gender, stress, and tobacco are cultural exposures. **Kleinman's** explanatory models show why pills fail when the illness is read as fate.
- Occupational dust and urban air are political environments.

Scope

- **Method:** ethnography plus prevalence. Aim: better programmes, not a romantic of 'traditional immunity'.

Flow diagram

Epidemiological anthropology -> Infection contact ecology

Epidemiological anthropology -> Diet stress inequality

Epidemiological anthropology -> Prevention programmes

Conclusion

Epidemiological anthropology's scope is the social production of infection and of chronic disease. It explains rates with kinship, work, stigma, and ecology, then feeds prevention.

Facts & figures

Snow

Broad Street pump: mapping infection as a social-spatial fact.

Barker

Fetal programming hypothesis for later adult disease.

Kleinman

Explanatory models of illness in clinical anthropology.

Sickle-malaria

A genetic-epidemiological classic still taught in this paper.