

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ECONOMIC CRISES AND HEALTH

KIRSTY WALKER

Centre for History and Economics

ABSTRACT. During periods of recession, both historians and policy-makers have tended to revisit the multi-faceted relationship between health and economic crisis. It seems likely that the current economic downturn will trigger a new revival of efforts to gauge its implications for people's health around the world. This review will reflect on aspects of the relationship between health and economic crisis, exploring some of the unanswered questions within the historiography of the Great Depression and health, and suggest new directions that this work might take. Within a broadly transnational framework, I will reassess the diverse historiographies of interwar public health, in order to highlight ways in which the methodologies used could inspire future studies for neglected areas within this field, such as Southeast Asia. In doing so, I will illustrate that the effects of the interwar economic fluctuations on health status remain imprecise and difficult to define, but marked a transitional moment in the history of public health.