

# Mapping new voices

## Towards a Latin American perspective in Global Mental Health

International Workshop, Paris, June 26-27, 2017

Over the last decade, mental health policy and practice have become increasingly global in scope and definition. From diagnostic tools to calls for the mainstreaming of mental health in the international development agenda, more and more aspects of mental health policy are framed, implemented and researched in comparative and/or global terms.

In this context, Global Mental Health (GMH) has emerged as a diverse field of research, policy, and advocacy structured around a broad set of actions and aims: the provision of universal access to mental health care; the 'scaling up' of services and expertise in response to different 'treatment gaps' in resource-constrained settings; the need for epidemiological research on mental diseases in low and middle-income countries (LMICs); and, more generally, the need to address social suffering in contexts of poverty, structural violence and humanitarian emergencies, in order to promote human rights of people with mental health problems and psychosocial disabilities.

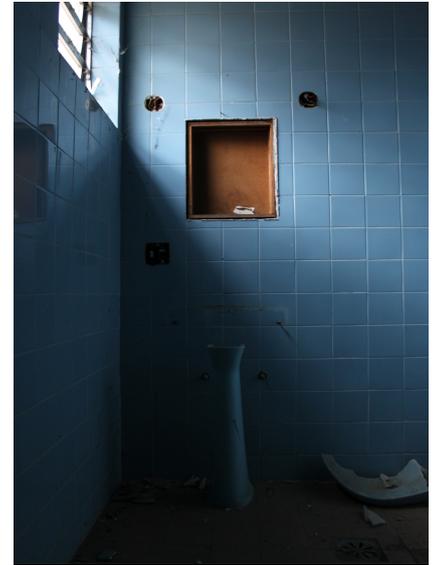
However, there has been a lack of consensus on these aims. For some critics, GMH's call for 'scaling-up' services and treatments responds to an imperialistic and neo-colonial drive to expand Euro-American psychiatry into developing countries. In this sense, the range of interpretations and responses to mental health issues across different cultures and local scenarios is disregarded and, at the same time, underlying economic, social and political complexities are framed and addressed through medical interventions.



Latin America has not had a major role in the debates shaping GMH, either as a target of comparative research and interventions, nor as a source of influential ideas and practices in the field. The region does not seem to provide the extreme examples of inhuman treatment that have been used to promote the idea of mental illnesses as a 'hidden emergency', urging governments, international agencies and donors to act. In fact, within the region, some countries have successfully integrated mental health into general health systems as part of the progressive realisation of universal health coverage.

But although some Latin American countries have experienced a reduction in poverty based on an accelerated process of modernization, different forms of inequality (income, ethnicity, and gender, etc.) and deep social vulnerability still dominate the region. Likewise, large 'zones of social abandonment' (poverty, extreme violence, socio-natural disasters, etc.) are characterised by minimum access to mental health care. However, until now, it is not clear that the GMH agenda has left space to recognise and engage with both local and non-medical specificities. In this sense, the status of Latin America remains difficult and contradictory when contrasted with the so-called 'Global North and South'.

From its inception, the GMH project has successfully mobilised notions of 'gap', 'scale', 'cost-effectiveness' and 'implementation' entirely framed in epidemiological and institutional terms. As a result of this, and given the prominence of contextual and historical elements, there is a need to promote critical research on GMH in/on Latin American countries, from the perspective of the social sciences and related disciplines (anthropology, sociology, history, social epidemiology, transcultural psychiatry, philosophy). These alternative perspectives could provide greater conceptual and empirical density to GMH, considering socio-historical processes in order to articulate the political, economic and institutional determinants of mental health and its impact on the concrete experiences of people in their daily lives.



In this sense, priority should be given to the exploration of local systems of ideas, values, and beliefs that shape mental health issues from the individual to the community levels, and the links between local and global dynamics of knowledge and practices. Instead of a restricted definition of 'gap', such a socio-anthropological approach could not only enrich the current definitions surrounding GMH but also problematise its foundations, serving as a basis to think the notion of 'global' in alternative ways.

On the basis of this, and considering the ambiguous status of Latin American within the GMH project, these are some of the problems that bring us together: How could the singularities of Latin America contribute to the study of the globalisation of psychiatry and mental health? How do the problems, demands and practice in mental health change once health care networks are extended, and epidemiological and treatment instruments improved? How has the articulation of processes of globalisation and localisation influenced the psychiatric and everyday languages used to talk about mental health issues in Latin America?

### **What is the purpose of this workshop?**

The workshop Mapping new voices: towards a Latin American perspective in Global Mental Health aims to bring together PhD students and early researchers whose work focuses on mental health in Latin American countries, and whose theoretical, methodological and/or analytic approaches make explicit use of the social sciences and related disciplines. Specifically, the workshop aims to:

1. Contribute to the development of an integrated view of Latin Americans' contemporary challenges and policy developments in the field of mental health.
2. Provide a space for the discussion and exchange of social sciences' approaches in the field of mental health research.
3. Contribute to the exchange and critical discussion of the place and role of Latin America in the context of Global Mental Health as an area of study, discipline, and normative/political project.
4. Serve as the starting point for the development of an international network of social researchers on mental health in Latin America.

### **Key themes**

This workshop aims to explore a range of issues, including:

1. Historical and emergent mental health issues in Latin American countries
  - o History of mental disorders, classifications, and categories
  - o History of policies and mental health systems (rights and regulations)
  - o Local idioms of distress, globalisation of psychiatry, transnational circulation of mental disorders and drugs
  - o Local knowledge and appropriation of international healing practices

2. Mental Health Policy in Latin American countries
  - o Global health institutions (WHO, ONGs, etc.) and Latin America
  - o Tensions between local values and international public health agendas
  - o Communities, users associations, activism and lobbying
  - o Major challenges of mental health policies (access to healthcare networks and the right to treatment)
  
3. Mental Health Research and the Social Sciences
  - o Social theory and research methodologies (comparative studies, social epidemiology, ethnography, stories from users, mixed-methods)
  - o Multidisciplinary studies and critical approaches to GMH (post-colonialism and psychiatry)
  - o Latin American mental health research gap
  - o From international to global: the 'global' as a concept in social sciences

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**Venue:** Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord, Paris, France.

**Date:** June 26-27, 2017.

**Submission of proposals:** Contributions from PhD students and early researchers are especially welcomed. Abstracts should have between 400-600 words. Those wishing to submit an abstract or express an interest in contributing please email [plasmaworkshop2017@gmail.com](mailto:plasmaworkshop2017@gmail.com). Abstracts will be reviewed by the scientific committee members. All contributions should be submitted before **March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017**.

**Keynote Speakers:** Anne Lovell (University of Paris Descartes), Catherine Campbell (London School of Economics and Political Science), and Clara Han (Johns Hopkins University).

**Organising Committee:** Gabriel Abarca (King's College London), Sofía Bowen (King's College London), Álvaro Jiménez (University of Paris Descartes/University of Chile), Cristián Montenegro (London School of Economics and Political Science), Claudio Maino (University of Paris Descartes), Norah Vera (King's College London).

**Scientific committee:** Dominique Béhague (King's College London), Catherine Campbell (London School of Economics), Alain Ehrenberg (University of Paris Descartes), Livia Velpry (University of Paris 8), Marianella Abarzúa (University of Chile), Anne Lovell (University of Paris Descartes), Esteban Radiszcz (University of Chile), Eunice Nakamura (Federal University of Sao Paulo), Betty Azócar (Médecins du Monde), David Orr (University of Sussex), Samuel Lézé (École Normale Supérieure de Lyon).

*Platform for Social Research on Mental Health in Latin America (PLASMA)*

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