

ISA Newsletter July 2023

Welcome

Welcome to the summer newsletter of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on the Sociology of Mental Health and Illness.

This newsletter contains updates from the recent XX ISA World Congress of Sociology as well as member publications and a couple of articles for discussion by members – Jeremy Dixon, Resident of RC 49.

XX ISA World Congress of Sociology

The World Congress was a big success being attended by 3028 people in person and 1673 online. RC49 held nine sessions, a business meeting and a social event. The sessions can be viewed [here](#).

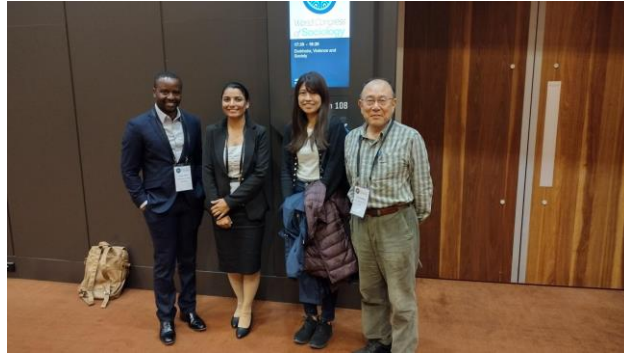
The next ISA World Congress of Sociology (XXI) will take place in Gwangju, Korea, July 4-10 2027.



1 - The RC49 business meeting.



2 - The current and previous presidents of RC49



3 - The chair and speakers from the Social and Emotional Well-Being of Adolescents and Young Adults Living in Rapidly Changing Real and Virtually Constructed Worlds session.

New Board Elected

With the World Congress in Sociology in Melbourne in June, the RC49 Presidency of Silvia Krumm and various other board members has come to an end. We would like to thank Silvia particularly for her hard work over the last 5 years.

President

- Jeremy Dixon – University of Bath, UK

Vice President

- Lynn Tang – Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Secretary

- Felipe Szazbon – University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Treasurer

- Kevin Stone, University of Warwick, UK

Board Members

1. Takashi Asakura, Tokyo Gakugei University, Japan
2. Jorge Chuaqu, Universidad de Valparaiso, Chile
3. Kjeld Hogsbro, Aalborg University, Denmark
4. Silvia Krumm, Ulm University, Germany
5. Bronwen Lichtenstein, The University of Alabama, USA
6. James G. Linn, Optimal Solutions in Healthcare and International Development, USA

Introduction to current members and new researchers attending the group.

At our Board Meeting this July we introduced ourselves and discussed our current research interests. Several researchers have sent summaries of their research interests, and these are given here. We aim to introduce other members to the group in future newsletters so if you would like to introduce yourself and your research please email jd582@bath.ac.uk:

- **Masum Billah** is currently doing his PhD in Health Science at Southern Cross University, New South Wales, Australia sponsored by Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. He obtained Master degree in Public Health in Disasters from Karolinska Institutet, Sweden, and the University of Oviedo, Spain funded by the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship. He also completed Honours and Master degree in Sociology, at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. His research work focuses on positive psychology, psychiatric epidemiology, lifestyle risk behaviours (SNAP), and non-communicable diseases. He is also a Senior Lecturer in Sociology (on study leave) at East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **Hsing-Jung Chen**, an Associate Professor of Social Work at the National Taiwan Normal University, focuses her research on the influence of risk and protective mechanisms on resilience and maladjustment among disadvantaged youths and women facing mental illness-related stressors, particularly mood disorders and substance use. She has recently conducted funded projects using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain understanding in the following areas: 1. The relationship between trauma and resilience, with a specific focus on children from disadvantaged families and individuals facing mental health challenges. 2. How school and family contexts shape adolescent well-being, health behaviours, and developmental outcomes, considering the role of social inequality and the ecological protective mechanisms. 3. How college students cope with stressors and the impact of high-tech development on their learning, career choices, and personal growth. 4. How the impact of family experiences, second and vicarious trauma, and job-related factors on social workers' identity, commitment, and job satisfaction.
- **Associate Professor Bruce Cohen** is a critical mental health scholar based in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. His research focuses on the expanding realms of psychiatric discourse and psy-professional power in neoliberal society. Towards his forthcoming monograph, he is currently researching 'mental health' as a contemporary moral metaphor which demands constant attentiveness, presentism, and productivity.
- **Michele Rocha El Kadri** works for the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), which is a research institute of the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), the equivalent of NHS in Brazil. Fiocruz has several regional offices throughout Brazil. Michele works at the regional office in the Amazonia (Fiocruz Amazonia). She graduated in Psychology and has a Doctorate in Public Health. Her research interests include Primary Health Care in rural/remote contexts, Qualitative Social Research, Mental Health in the Public Health System. She is working now on a project "Access to health services on the Brazil-Colombia-Peru triple border." In this project they have several master's students involved in research of various health networks such as mental health, indigenous health, maternal and child services.

- **Jeremy Dixon** is a senior lecturer in social work at the University of Bath. He joined the University of Bath in 2012 as a Lecturer in Social Work, having worked for three years as a lecturer in Social Work at the University of the West of England, Bristol before that. He qualified as a social worker in 1998 and worked in a wide variety of mental health settings in the statutory and voluntary sectors. This included work within community mental health teams, assertive outreach teams, drug and alcohol teams and work within forensic mental health settings. He has several research interests. These include i. The views of people with mental health problems on their own mental health care. ii. The views of carers towards mental health care. iii. How professionals interpret law and policy. He uses perspectives from the sociology of mental health and illness and the sociology of risk and uncertainty to examine these issues.

- **Monika Frąckowiak-Sochańska** works as an associate professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). Monika is interested in socially constructed meanings of the categories of mental health and mental disorders and the gender aspects of mental health. She conducts research on: 1) men with eating disorders and 2) social trauma perceived from the psychotherapy perspective (on the example of the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine).

- **Kjeld Høgsbro**, Phd in cultural sociology and professor emeritus of social work at Aalborg University. I have conducted research entailing ethnographies of services for people with mental and cognitive difficulties. I am currently working with the development of these ethnographic methods as well as theories addressing the causes and sociogenesis of mental illness.

- **Agata Krasowska** - Ph.D. in sociology, is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology of Work and Economy at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Wrocław in Poland. Her main research interests are in the sociology of work, social change, the sociology of mental health and illness, and the methodology of qualitative research (biographical method and autoethnography).

- **Professor Silvia Krumm** leads the Working Group for Qualitative Social Research at the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy II at Ulm University. As a sociologist, she applies social science perspectives to mental health and illness, with a focus on themes related to the social inclusion of individuals with severe mental disorders. Her research topics include the role and impact of gender (e.g., masculinity and depression), family and reproductive issues (e.g., desire for children, unwanted pregnancies), vocational rehabilitation for individuals with severe mental disorders, and experiences of violence and victimization against people with mental health problems. She employs participatory research and qualitative research methods.

- **Tracey LaPierre** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Kansas in the United States. Tracey's research investigates how social norms, relationships and aspects of the health care system contribute to systematic health inequalities. Her research interests include: 1. Reproductive decision making among women with disabilities; 2. Home and community long term care and 3. Informal caregiving.

- **James G. Linn (AKA Gary)** is based in Nashville Tennessee where he has lived since 1983. He is a Senior Researcher at Optimal Solutions in Healthcare and International Development and a Clinical Professor at Meharry Medical College. He also collaborates with sociologists and other faculty at the Center for Latin America at Vanderbilt University and at the Institute for Global Health at Vanderbilt University. He is also a Visiting Professor in Sociology at La Universidad de Valparaiso, Chile where he collaborates on lectures and the drafting of papers and editing books. He has participated in their

academic visits program since 2016. In Mozambique, he is an advisor to the School of Public Health of Mondlane University and on the PhD committee of Joaquim Matavel (who is a member of RC-49). He is an editor of the JAHR Journal (Journal of HIV and AIDS Research) and Coordinator of the Section of Chronic Disease and Disability of the World Social Science Association.

- **Lynn Tang** will soon be joining Department of Health Studies, Royal Holloway, University of London, as Lecturer in Health Studies. She has two broad research interests. One is around ethnic minorities, inequalities and recovery. The other is suicide and suicide prevention. She recently researched on suicide prevention for youth, as well as the perceptions of suicide in the context of collective trauma and crisis.

Recent Publications by RC 49 members

- Bark, H., Dixon, J. and Laing, J., 2023. The Professional Identity of Social Workers in Mental Health Services: A Scoping Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(11), p.5947. Open access at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20115947>
- Cohen, B. (Ed), 2023. Theorising Mental Health: Special Issue of New Zealand Sociology. All articles are open access at: <https://tinyurl.com/35uvy2c4>
- Cohen, B. M. Z. and Hartmann, R. 2023. The “Feminisation” of Psychiatric Discourse: A Marxist Analysis of Women’s Roles in Neoliberal Society, *Journal of Sociology*, 59(2): 349-364, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833211043570>
- Dixon, J., 2023. Adult Safeguarding Observed: How Social Workers Assess and Manage Risk and Uncertainty. Bristol: Policy Press. Open access chapters can be accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc7z7rvs>
- Forrester-Jones, R., Dixon, J. and Jaynes, B., 2023. Exploring romantic need as part of mental health social care practice. *Disability & Society*, pp.1-23. Open access at: <https://tinyurl.com/bp86ahh7>
- Linn, J. G. and Gonzalez E.A., 2023. North American sociology: perspectives on social stratification in the united states--basic concepts in Social Classes in Chile: Theory and Data, Independent Editions, Vina del Mar Chile (in Spanish).
- Linn, J.G. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=James G. Linn>), Chuaqui, J. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Jorge Chuaqui>) and Alencar, A. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Aristoteles Alencar>) (2022), "COVID-19 in Chile: Personal and Political Outcomes", Aladuwaka, S. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Seela Aladuwaka>), Wejnert, B. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Barbara Wejnert>) and Alagan, R. (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=Ram Alagan>) (Ed.) *Systemic Inequality, Sustainability and COVID-19 (Research in Political Sociology, Vol. 29)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 211-221. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0895-993520220000029016>
- Matavel, J.S., Munguambe, K.A., Wilson, D.R., Loquiha, O. and Linn, J.G., 202. Cross-cultural adaptation of an intimate partner violence screening tool (WAST) for the Mozambican context;

implications for more effective HIV prevention and treatment counseling. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 13(4), pp.81-91. <https://tinyurl.com/s49f5v6j>

- McLeay, R., Powell, D. and Cohen, B. M. Z. 2023. Young People's Voices On Emotions: A Narrative Inquiry, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2233945>

Towards a sociology of mental disease

At the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology several models of mental health were discussed. Professor Kjeld Høgsbro suggested that it would be good to present some of these ideas in the newsletter to generate debate. We present two pieces here. The first is by Kjeld and the second is by Dr Jeremy Dixon and Professor Dirk Richter summarizing their recent article on models of mental disorder in the *Journal of Mental Health*. The purpose of these short pieces is to generate discussion and debate, so we would welcome any responses or preliminary ideas in future newsletters.

Towards a sociology of mental disease, By Kjeld Høgsbro, Aalborg University, Denmark.

In the last two decades, the common international reference for understanding mental disease has been the vulnerability model stipulating that mental illnesses occur as a product of biological, psychological, and social factors influencing the individual human being during its birth, childhood, and later social relations. This has been supplemented by the ICF model for understanding disability, or in general different forms of diseases, as an interrelation between body functions and structures, activities, and participation, which on the other hand is influenced by personal factors as well as environmental factors. Both models are descriptive models, which does not privilege any specific theoretical approach, nor do they emphasize any specific balance between the influence of the different factors in the models.

So, what does characterize the social factors in both models? What has been the sociological contributions to understanding the genesis of mental illness as well as interrelation between disease and social environment or context?

The presentation this year has focused on schizophrenia, autism and ADHD, and the sociological theories, which have been applied to these forms of diseases since the 1950ies. Those theories have typically been influenced by public movements in a specific historical context, but simultaneously, they might as well deliver important theoretical elements and empirical findings showing at least a direction for a sociology of mental disease defining both the social influence on its development and the social situation of people with mental illnesses in a competitive society.

The effort is to find a synthesis between professional and lay experience with these diseases, different theoretical considerations and empirical findings combined with recent ideas which look at the three forms of mental illness as being 'only' exaggerated forms of basic human competences as Baron-Cohen does in his book *The pattern seekers* from 2020.

This means roughly:

Diagnosis when suffering	Ability in specific social contexts	Exaggerated mental state	Necessary human competence
Autism	Abel to identify complex patterns when given unlimited time and not disturbed by other impressions.	Inability to ignore patterns and sort out impressions.	The ability to identify patterns in visual and auditorial phenomenon.
Schizophrenia	Ability to create artificial scenarios when being able to distinguish between different cognitive states.	Inability to distinguish between factual and contrafactual scenarios.	The ability to imagine contrafactual scenarios.
ADHD	Ability to survey surroundings and risks in stressed situation and settings.	Inability to focus and concentrate.	The ability to simultaneously register plenty visual and auditory inputs.

This will be specified and put into an extended model of vulnerability in a next issue of the newsletter.

Key words: Mental illness, vulnerability, ICF, social theory.

Models of Mental Health: A review of current theories, By Jeremy Dixon, University of Bath (UK) and Dirk Richter, Bern University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland)

Our recent review of the theoretical models used around the world to assess, diagnose, research, and treat mental health problems has highlighted the vast array of approaches which exist. Theoretical models refer to a theory, or a set of theories, which seek to explain how an issue should be understood and responded to. A model for mental health problems refers to the causes and characteristics of the condition.

By examining over 100 publications which referenced ‘mental health’ or ‘mental illness’ in some way, we identified some 34 different theoretical models used by practitioners, researchers and users of mental health services to understand the nature of mental health problems. Importantly, we found no criteria which could be used to prioritise why one model might be used over another. This matters, because how mental health problems are understood has lasting ramifications for how people with mental health problems are assessed and supported.

These ranged from biological models (focussing on problems with the body or brain), to psychological (focussing on the mind and behaviour), sociological (focussing how social circumstances affect people), to models which were informed by consumer and cultural considerations (which reflect the experiences of people who have been treated by mental health services and consider how treatments should be adapted to different cultures).

Whilst previously, policymakers and practitioners tried to form consensus about using so-called ‘bio-psycho-social models’ - a catch-all term, which draws on elements of all different models - this consensus seems to be fracturing.

Our findings have important implications in view of the steep increase in mental health problems diagnosed. Uncertainties about what constitutes a mental health problem have become more

pronounced in recent decades due to the increase in the number of mental health conditions being identified in the manuals which are used by general practitioners and psychiatrists.

Mental health problems are often presented as something which are understood by medicine and psychiatry. Yet, debate remains about what exactly mental health problems are and how they should be treated. These are not just academic. Questions such as, 'what are mental health problems?' or 'what counts as a mental illness?' have impacts within health care systems. They can affect decisions around who might receive a mental health service and how behaviours such as aggression might be interpreted.

One way out of this issue could be to ask service users which model they feel to be most appropriate for them and their treatment. The consequence, however, would be that non-medical models might become more important than clinicians would be willing to accept.

In view of the wide range of models that are used by practitioners, we call for greater clarity over how different and potentially contracting mental health models can be used in practice. We argue that this debate needs greater input from non-medical professions and service users.

Mental health practitioners tend to say that they use a bio-psycho-social model in their everyday work, but our research shows that this model is fracturing. Whilst this field has been dominated by psychiatry and psychology, the perspectives of users of services and other professionals such as nurses and social workers are now beginning to be heard. Mental health services need to recognise the wide range of perspectives which are now held by those who use services. Rather than insisting users of services accept biological or psychological perspectives, mental health professionals need to understand and work to people's preferences.

Our full article is available open access from the Journal of Mental Health.

- Richter, D. and Dixon, J., 2023. Models of mental health problems: a quasi-systematic review of theoretical approaches. *Journal of Mental Health*, 32(2), pp.396-406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2021.2022638>

Members news items

The Politics of Mental Health and Illness book series

Bruce Cohen has recently set up an exciting new book series with Palgrave titled ***The Politics of Mental Health and Illness*** which he is hoping will be of interest to some, if not many of you! He has already published Diana Rose's excellent book, 'Mad Knowledges and User-Led Research'. He welcomes proposals for monographs and edited collections which engage with social theory and the mental health field in a critical manner. More details are available here: <https://link.springer.com/series/16854>

He is very happy for people to contact him directly with their queries or ideas for a book:
b.cohen@auckland.ac.nz

Call for news items

Please submit any news items for the next edition of the newsletter to Jeremy Dixon at jd582@bath.ac.uk