

'Health, Illness and Ethnicity': Migration, Discrimination and Social Dislocation

University College Dublin, (organisers Catherine Cox, University College Dublin, Sarah York, University College Dublin/ Warwick University and Hilary Marland Warwick University).

Workshop report



'Session on Migration and Mental Illness'

Speakers (left to right): Letizia Gramaglia, Hilary Marland, Catherine Cox, Sarah York and Marjorie Harper.

This two-day workshop held on the 10th and 11th June 2011 was hosted by the Centre for the History of Medicine at University College Dublin, co-organised by Catherine Cox (University College Dublin), Sarah York (University College Dublin/ Warwick University), and Hilary Marland (Warwick University) and was generously supported by the Wellcome Trust. It was the second event associated with the ongoing Wellcome Trust project 'Madness, Migration and the Irish in Lancashire, c.1850-1921'. The workshop was designed to bring together researchers from a variety of different disciplines to focus on the relationship between illness, migration, discrimination and social dislocation. The focus was primarily on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though a small number of papers related to contemporary challenges in providing effective health services for migrant communities were included.

Following opening remarks by Dr Catherine Cox, the keynote speaker Alison Bashford (University of Sydney) provided a masterly synthesis of insanity and immigration restrictions. She challenged the view of historians who have posited that the immigration restriction acts were eugenic with respect to powers of ethnic and race-based exclusion. Instead, Bashford suggested that the standard insanity clause in almost all immigration acts became a key manifestation of international eugenic practice.

In the first session, on contemporary health inequalities, community interpreter Krisztina Zimányi (Dublin City University) explored difficulties in accessing

the views of immigrant mental health care service users in a community interpreting context in Ireland. She posited that it was not just language but also dialect, ethnic background, gender and religion of both client and interpreter that needed to be considered in order to provide appropriate interpretation. Sinead Donohue, a public health professional (Health Protection Surveillance Centre, Dublin), addressed the need for clinical cultural competence training at postgraduate level for the medical profession in Ireland. The third speaker in the first session, sociologist Ronnie Moore (University College Dublin), examined travellers and change in the twenty-first century. He presented recent findings on the health of Irish travellers from the series of 'Our Geels' Traveller Health Technical Reports (2010).

The second session, which also focused on health inequalities, juxtaposed the historical and contemporary. John Odin Jensen (Sea Education Association, Massachusetts) reviewed cultural and organisational responses to immigrant and transient illness in the American Midwest, focussing on Buffalo, New York, 1825-1890. Physiotherapist Viktoria Zander (Mälardalen University) discussed the magnitude of reciprocity in chronic pain management using the experiences of dispersed ethnic populations of Muslim women.

The first day concluded with a historical session addressing disease. Katherine Foxhall (King's College London) examined naval surgeons' early attempts to vaccinate British and Irish emigrants and convicts against smallpox during voyages to Australia, 1820 to 1850. In analysing themes of coercion, compulsion and dislocation, Foxhall argued that, rather than simply seeing voyages as vectors, what happened in the maritime spaces between metropole and colony provides important evidence about medicine's role in colonial history. In the final paper, Anne Mac Lellan (University College Dublin) analysed the changing understanding of tubercular Irish nurses in England in the middle third of the twentieth century. Her paper explored the epidemiological evidence provided by tuberculin testing and x-rays which demonstrated the immunological vulnerability of these nurses to tuberculosis, replacing the older belief that the Irish nurses imported the disease into England.

Roberta Bivins (University of Warwick) began the second day of the workshop. Continuing the theme of disease, her paper explored medical responses to postcolonial migrants and their ethnically marked descendents in the era of decolonisation and the Cold War. John Welshman (Lancaster University) traced the emphasis given, or not given, to ethnicity in research on poverty and social exclusion in the United Kingdom in the period since the 1970s. The final paper in this session was presented by political geographer Alan Ingram (University College London), who mapped the management of HIV and AIDS in the UK in terms of their intersection with contemporary modes of government, relating this to concerns about the impact of migration.

The workshop concluded with a historical session focussing on mental illness. Majorie Harper (University of Aberdeen) outlined the beginnings of a project on dysfunction, detention and deportation of Scottish migrants to post-Confederation Canada. Then Letizia Gramaglia (University of Warwick) drew on the experience of Dr Robert Grieve, medical superintendent of the lunatic asylum in British Guiana, to explore the relationship between migration and mental illness in the British West Indies during the second part of the nineteenth century. The final paper, by Catherine Cox, Hilary Marland and Sarah York, analysed the experiences of Irish

migrants in the Lancashire asylum system in the mid- to late nineteenth century. An examination of the impact of the Irish on management within the asylum system was coupled with individual stories of migration, employment, destitution and repatriation.

The workshop brought together researchers from a variety of disciplines, including history, medicine, sociology and geography, stimulating vibrant discussion of historical and current-day issues on the subject of health, ethnicity and migration.

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