



'Beyond Pavlov: Understandings of Psychological Distress in Eastern Europe'

An International 2-day symposium to take place at the University of Warwick (UK), 13-14 May 2027

Deadline for the Submission of Abstracts: 1 January 2027

The figure of Ivan Pavlov has continued to loom large in histories of the psy-disciplines under communism. The rejection of psychoanalysis in favour of a Pavlovian behaviourist model in the Soviet Union, as well as many parts of Eastern Europe after WWII, has long distinguished socialist mental health care from Western psychiatric practices. The 'Pavlovisation' of science and medicine in the Soviet sphere of influence has been widely linked to communist psychiatry's neglect of the mental realm in favour of physiological explanations and its isolation from Western developments. Yet, as scholars have recently begun to show, political pressures did not stamp out a plurality of approaches to the mind under state socialism. Contesting the tendency to see the socialist path of psychiatric care as starkly distinct from the West, recent histories have uncovered a continuing interest in psychological experience and a body of scientific research on the question of traumatised consciousness. While recognising the constraints placed on medical experts in the region, this symposium asks what might be missed in understanding East European psy-expertise solely through the lens of Pavlovian orthodoxy? This 2-day symposium will bring together scholars from different disciplinary and area specialisms to consider how psy-experts in the region have challenged, revised or expanded Pavlovian paradigms.

Confirmed Keynote Speaker: Benjamin Zajicek, Towson University

The organisers invite abstracts for papers that address the following questions:

1. What were the limits of Pavlovian theory's influence on institutional practices and everyday experiences of distress, rehabilitation, and social reintegration?
2. How did interpretations of Pavlov's teaching differ across the Soviet republics and/or the Eastern Bloc? How did specific local contexts shape research, diagnosis, and the treatment of psychological distress within caregiving and punitive institutions?
3. What other paradigms did Soviet and Eastern European medical and scientific experts deploy in understanding the psychological repercussions of revolution, war, displacement, famine, and state repression?
4. How did medical and scientific experts' understandings of Pavlov's legacy shift over time? What changes took place in how experts in the region understood the relationship between mind, body and environment?
5. To what extent did transnational networks and debates in the psy-sciences impact understandings of mental health and illness in the region, and vice versa?
6. What meanings did Pavlovian concepts acquire in popular culture and in first person accounts? What overlaps and/or tensions existed between cultural and medical understandings of Pavlov's theories?

The symposium is part of the Wellcome-funded research project: '[Traumatised Minds: Neurosis and Hysteria in Soviet Medicine and Culture, 1917-1953](#)'.

Organisers: Anna Toropova, Olga Smolyak, and Tom Stevens (University of Warwick)

Please send a paper title, an abstract of 300 words and a brief academic biography (200 words) to anna.toropova.1@warwick.ac.uk by the 1st of January 2027. Limited funding is available to assist presenters with travel and accommodation costs (priority will be given to PhD students, early career scholars and those from institutions without research funds). Please specify whether you require financial assistance to attend in your proposal.

