

CALL FOR PAPERS

Joint Workshop

Health and Human Rights Unit, School of Law & Centre for the Study of Risk and Inequality, QUB

18 June 2019

“SCIENCE AS RISK” IN INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKING ON VACCINATION: THE RIGHT TO REFUSE, THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE AND THE DUTY TO PROTECT?

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PROBLEM STATEMENT: Vaccine hesitancy has been rising in several world regions. Vaccines are no longer widely recognised as critical tools for ensuring populations’ health and one of the greatest scientific achievements; instead, some individuals, interest groups, and even healthcare personnel, perceive them as a risk to health. A resulting decrease in vaccination rates has led to lowered herd immunity in societies and the return of diseases, such as measles, which had largely been removed.

In response, many national laws have been adopted introducing compulsory vaccination and narrowed exemptions, and the EU issued a Recommendation to tackle vaccine hesitancy. The issue is also one of WHO’s top health challenges in 2019. In parallel, scholarly debate in various disciplines has intensified, with a focus on diverse factors that affect individual decision-making on vaccination (eg fear, distrust, fake news), best practices in public health for addressing them, and legislative solutions, including the extent to which individual rights can be limited in the interests of public health protection. To date, however, there has been little attempt to bring together the views of scholars and stakeholders.

WORKSHOP AIM: This workshop aims to provide a forum for both transdisciplinary debate and inter-sectoral dialogue. It uses a frame of “science as risk” as a conceptual lens to steer its participants while asking them to consider: (i) the nature and merits of a rights-based approach to vaccination; and (ii) whether the application of this approach can serve both regulatory and public health goals through, e.g., promoting trust in healthcare and medicine, and as a result, lead to better regulation and an increase of confidence in vaccination.

Proposals on, but not limited to, the following themes are invited:

- the scope of states’ powers to compel vaccination, including school/day care vaccination laws.
- the protection of human rights of affected individuals: those who refuse vaccination on philosophical, religious, or emotional grounds such as fear and distrust; of vaccinated persons who bear costs of population’s health (eg, sides effects); and of those who are put at risk by lowered herd immunity (eg, infants, pregnant women). The examples concern: the right to refuse vaccination, but also the right to refuse unvaccinated children at schools/day care centres, the right to equal access to education and non-discrimination, the right to informed consent and receiving information, the right to health as well as children’s rights.
- alternatives to mandatory vaccination laws (eg, state funds, compensation laws, healthcare personnel training schemes on mediation and risk communication on vaccination and supporting scientific evidence).
- sociological/psychological evidence regarding risk perception of vaccines, including cost/benefit analysis.
- emergency vaccination in the case of pandemics, including the use of experimental medicine and vaccines approved in fast-track authorisation procedures.

Please send your abstract of up to 500 words to: p.dabrowska@qub.ac.uk by 31 March 2019. Limited funding for travel and accommodation is available and will be allocated subject to numbers.

