



## **Health, healthcare and social justice: The 9th Biennial International Society of Critical Health Psychology Conference, 12 to 15 July 2015, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa**

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For the very first time on South African soil, International Society of Critical Health Psychology Conference took place at Rhodes University in Grahamstown from 12 to 15 July 2015. The conference was hosted by the International Society of Critical Health Psychology, which consists of members who share an interest in critical health, critical theory and critical practice in relation to health and healthcare. In addition to the society's members, the ISCHP2015 attracted a wide range of presenters including health service providers, activists, and scholars in a diversity of disciplines that take a critical orientation to health, illness and healthcare.

The theme of the 9th biennial conference was 'Health, Healthcare and Social Justice', a theme which provided an opportunity for dialogue on the conditions that shape people's experiences of health and illness and the type of care they receive. Furthermore, it provided a platform for the analysis of issues that supports the health and social inequalities that continue across various contexts. Within this theme, the following subthemes framed the conference: health systems, histories and politics; critical health education, interventions and treatment; critical theory and methods in health research and lastly, health and healthcare in social and communicative contexts.

The conference's programme included a diversity of presentation formats and an impressive social programme. Presentation formats included posters, individual papers, symposiums and PechaKucha (a simple presentation format comprised of images only, advancing automatically after a few seconds). The scientific programme consisted of six parallel sessions with stimulating and high-quality presentations which took place over three days with three keynote addresses and a plenary session. The latter involved a discussion on the legal capacity and the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. In line with this, a critical reflective question asking: "Are we going where we need to be?" was posed by Prof. Melvyn Freeman, an employee from the Department of Health, which was then critically discussed.

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The keynote speakers, through their presentations, stimulated critical thinking and discussion around various health-related issues. Prof. Garth Stevens discussed “The vexing nature of violence: Some coordinates for reconsidering the ‘violence-health nexus’ in a de-colonial moment”. The second keynote address was delivered by Prof. Leslie Swartz who presented on “Care, health and bodies out of place”. The final keynote address by Prof. Michelle Fine explored an epistemology of precarity with a focus on critical theory and participatory methods in times of widening inequality gaps.

The social programme, as with the conference presentations, is one that will be remembered for a long time to come. In addition to providing delegates from all over the world with an opportunity to network, the ISCHP2015 conference commenced when the National Arts Festival came to a close, however, delegates were treated to a performance from the National Arts Festival. It exposed delegates to the various cultures and issues relevant to the South African context. This was taken further on the second evening with the screening of *Miners Shot Down* with the filmmaker in attendance. This was the first time that a number of delegates saw the film. After the screening, the mood was characterised by sadness, loss and helplessness. It reinforced the importance of advocating for change as social scientists, especially in South Africa.

The conference ended off with community visits which comprised of four options that delegates could choose from. These were the Ubunye Foundation; Upstart Youth Development Project; Keiskamma Trust and the Fort England Psychiatric Hospital. The Ubunye Foundation involved a tour of the Mgcamabele Community Centre at the Kwandwe Private Game Reserve and provided delegates with the opportunity to learn about their family health programme. The Upstart Youth Development Project provided delegates with an opportunity to learn more about the Upstarters who have produced community newspapers and short films which enabled them to become agents of change. The third option available to delegates was the Keiskamma Trust, which involved an opportunity to learn more about the latest initiatives of this community project with various projects such as art, health and music programmes aimed at supporting local communities. Lastly, the Fort England Psychiatric Hospital community visit consisted of an interactive walk for delegates to learn more about the history of the institution and the programmes offered to patients.

Overall, the ISCHP2015 brought together people from different countries with various social and cultural backgrounds who shared interest in challenging health inequalities and exposed them to the cultures and issues specific to South Africa and globally. Furthermore, the ISCHP2015 highlighted the social, political and cultural dimensions of health and illness such as poverty, racism, sexism, political oppression as well as the active commitment to reduce human suffering and promote an improved quality of life. Furthermore, the

ISCHP2015 showed their dedication by supporting students and researchers starting out in this field with student bursaries that cover all expenses.

## REFERENCES

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