

Summer Semester 2024

IHS 14 Study Project International Health Sciences: “Decolonizing Global Health“

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Background

Colonial ways of thinking and doing infuse global health architecture, priority setting, and practice. This study project explores the structures, systems, and modes of thinking that informed the development of “global health” historically and that continue (with some continuities from its past) to constitute global health today. Colonial relations are, arguably, the foundation on which interactions at all “levels”, from micro to macro, between the “global north” and “global south”, spanning personal to inter- and cross-governmental interactions, global health research, practice, and evaluation are predicated.

Recent discussions on decoloniality in general and decolonizing global health in particular are accelerating and bringing into public discourse decades-old debates, theorizing and activism on this topic. The basic premise of decoloniality, namely that the end of explicit political colonization has not meant the end of Western imperialism, alerts us to the colonial-era inequalities that western imperialism and neoliberal globalization alike continue to perpetuate.

Through this study project, students will develop an understanding of “coloniality” and the “coloniality of power”, paying particular attention to how the structures and practices of settler colonialism and colonial governance continue to influence global health research and practice in the present. Via an excursion through key elements of the movement to decolonize global health (including, but not limited to, power imbalances in research processes, co-production/expertise/representation, leadership in global health research, global health priority setting, discourse, racism, and white saviourism), they will develop concrete suggestions for progressing towards decoloniality in these domains, rising to the call (expressed by Catherine Walsh and others) for decoloniality to include the ongoing creation of ways of thinking, knowing, sensing, being, and living outside coloniality, or “making decolonial cracks in the system of coloniality”.

Target and expected result

This study project involves researching, analysing, reporting and presenting on key components of historical and contemporary efforts to decolonize global health. Participants will investigate the evolving debates on decoloniality in global health, focusing in particular on global health research and practice.

In a final group presentation structured according to the students’ choosing, study group participants will present their analysis of the depth and breadth of efforts to decolonize global health and outline concrete courses of action for engaging with such efforts throughout their global health careers.

Scientific methods to be applied

The following scientific methodological approaches will be prioritised:

1. literature review (on historical and contemporary developments pertaining to decolonizing global health; key elements of the debate; core components within the concept of decoloniality),
2. analysis of expert interviews (and, possibly, design and conduct of additional interviews)
3. methods specific to the development of a presentation designed for a general audience.

The project offers students an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the complexity of global health research and practice, in consideration of its historical and political development.