Report

Human Rights Education in Public Health Graduate Schools: 1996 Survey

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Recent expositions of the relationship between health and human rights suggest the need for public health workers to understand human rights concepts and practices.[1,2,3,4] While specific task-oriented human rights training for health professionals has begun, the availability of health and human rights courses in schools of public health (SPH)—a presumptive training ground for public health workers—is open to question.[5,6]

There have been few systematic attempts to survey human rights education in *any* health-related graduate program; two existing surveys focus on medical schools, but no prior surveys of SPH exist.[7] This in part reflects a general lack of reviews of SPH curricula globally.[8] The World Health Organization's data on SPH curricula are both inadequate and seriously outdated. Furthermore, none of the world's four regional associations of SPH, covering the United States, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific Region, keeps curricular data sufficiently detailed to be useful.[9,10]

Therefore, a survey was conducted with the goal of determining the number and content of courses fully and explicitly focused on health and human rights in SPH in the United States and selected countries worldwide.

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Methods

The survey included all 28 accredited SPH in the United States, and 15 US Masters of Public Health (MPH) programs outside of SPH.[11] For each school, telephone interviews with senior administrators led to identification of courses, and to subsequent interviews with course instructors. Course syllabi were also requested and reviewed.

In addition, 34 other countries' SPH programs were surveyed through telephone interviews with informants including professors and deans at schools of medicine and public health, as well as representatives of nongovernmental organizations and others.[12]

Results

In the United States, five of the 28 SPH and none of the 15 MPH programs outside of SPH reported offering health and human rights courses. The first course was taught at Harvard in the 1991-92 academic year; a second was added in 1994-95. Johns Hopkins University inaugurated a course in 1993-94; the University of California at Berkeley and Yale University followed suit in 1994-95, and Boston University's course began this spring. A brief description of each course is given in the Annex.

Two courses were identified in the 34 other countries surveyed: one in Mexico, at the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (National School of Public Health), and the other in Australia, at Monash University, as part of the Victorian Universities Consortium MPH program. Both were first taught in 1994-95.

Of the eight courses identified, six examine a range of issues in health and human rights, one focuses specifically on AIDS and human rights, and one focuses on health and human rights issues concerning children and young people. The six overview courses give approximately equal emphasis to certain core topics in human rights (e.g. history of human rights, review of human rights instruments, the universalism/relativism debate), but tend to emphasize different aspects of the relationship between health and human rights. For example, the Berkeley course focuses substantially on the documentation and health consequences of conflict and torture, while the Johns Hopkins course spends considerable

time on the human rights burdens created by public health practices. Yet overall, a pattern emerges; the six courses emphasize the relationship between human rights and the practice of public health and medicine, as well as the health consequences of civil and political rights violations. With the exception of the Harvard and Monash University courses, however, the relationship between health and violations of social, economic, and cultural rights, receives relatively little attention.[13]

Discussion

The survey results suggest that explicit training in public health and human rights is not available to the overwhelming majority of public health students in the United States or around the world. It is, however, important to emphasize two obvious limitations of the survey. First, it sought to identify only courses fully and explicitly focused on health and human rights. Several courses with explicit but minimal human rights content were noted by informants, as were several with substantial but merely implicit human rights content.[14] Second, a truly global survey was not feasible; therefor, the existence of other courses cannot be ruled out.

The results prompt several thoughts on the challenge of expanding the availability of health and human rights courses in SPH. First, many SPH now offer courses in public health ethics (a few of which briefly mention the health and human rights perspective). Informants often conflated the scope and approach of ethics with those of human rights. Yet, courses in public health ethics, as commonly taught, bear little similarity to the health and human rights courses identified by this survey. To the extent that the distinction between ethics and human rights remains unclear to SPH practioners, programs committed to teaching public health ethics may not recognize the value of the health and human rights perspective.

Second, existing health and human rights courses tend to be closely associated with international health in a variety of ways. For example, the Harvard and Yale courses are taught within departments of international health; the Johns Hopkins course is titled, "International Health and Human

Rights;" and the Boston University and Berkeley courses indicate their special applicability to students interested in international health. This association, perhaps most pronounced in the United States, may signal to students and scholars interested primarily in domestic public health, that the health and human rights perspective does not apply to their work.

Finally, the recent emergence of health and human rights as a field presents a considerable, if predictable, barrier to the creation of new courses in the short term. More time will be required for health and human rights ideas to penetrate the public health establishment, including SPH.

In part to help overcome these barriers, several innovations instituted at Harvard are now being adapted and developed in different SPH. These include organization of 3 to 4-day "short courses" on health and human rights for public health professionals, the distribution of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at graduation ceremonies, the creation of a health and human rights lecture series, and the formation of a health and human rights student group. In addition, Harvard is preparing a textbook for human rights education at the School of Public Health level. Hopefully, these actions will help promote a broader understanding of the value and need for health and human rights education in all SPH.

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Annex

Health and Human Rights Courses Identified as of February 1996

If you are aware of additional courses, we would appreciate your sending this information to the author.

In the United States:

Boston University, School of Public Health
Boston, Massachusetts
Course Title: Human Rights and Health
Instructors: Michael Grodin and George Annas
Department: Health Law Department
First Year Taught: 1995-96.
Other: The course is optional but recommended for the International Health concentration.
Main Topics:

- The philosophy of human rights in health
- Human rights instruments
- Vulnerability, health, and rights
- Human rights and public health practice; religious and cultural issues
- Women's health and human rights
- Health and human rights in conflicts
- AIDS and human rights
- Human experimentation; physician involvement in human rights violations
- Enforcement—are there rights without sanctions?
- NGOs and human rights

Harvard University, School of Public Health
Boston, Massachusetts
Course Title: Health and Human Rights
Instructors: Jonathan Mann and Sofia Gruskin
Department: Department of Population and International Health
First Year Taught: 1991-92.
Other: The course is optional.
Main Topics:

Part I: Introduction to Human Rights
- History of the human rights movement
- Human rights instruments
- Institutions, monitoring, enforcement
- Universalism and relativism, public/private spheres, duties, restrictions on rights

Part II: Health Effects of Human Rights Violations
- In peacetime
- Reproductive health and reproductive rights
- In times of conflict

Part III: Impact of Public Health Practice on Human Rights
- Negotiating public health goals and human rights norms. Examples include: STD, cardiovascular disease

Part IV: Promotion of Health and Human Rights
- Examples include: Asthma, preventing heterosexual transmission of HIV/AIDS
- Non-discrimination, dignity, and health

Part V: Conclusion
- The right to health
- Roles and responsibilities of pulic health professionals and the transformation of public health

Author's Comment: The course is organized, in a manner familiar to readers of this journal, according to the tripartite understanding of the relationship between health and human rights: 1) Public health practice can burden or benefit human rights; 2) Human rights violations adversely affect health; and 3) Promotion and protection of health is inextricibly linked to promotion and protection of human rights.[15]

Harvard University, School of Public Health
Boston, Massachusetts
Course Title: Child Rights/Child Health
Instructors: Sofia Gruskin and Jonathan Mann
Department: Department of Population and International Health
First Year Taught: 1994-95.
Other: The course is optional. Seminar format.
Main Topics:

- The course explores select issues in children's health using general principles of children's rights as elaborated in international HR instruments, with a primary focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Course participants explore a health-related topic of their own choosing in an in-depth research paper. The Convention's several principles—including best interest of the child, nondiscrimination, right to life, survival and development, and the right of the child to express their views, and to be heard when they do so—are used as the seminar's organizational framework.

Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health/Georgetown University, Law Center
Baltimore, Maryland/Washington, D.C.
Course Title: International Health and Human Rights
Instructor: Lawrence Gostin
Department: Georgetown University Law Center
First Year Taught: 1993-94.
Other: The course is optional, but is required for members of the Georgetown/Johns Hopkins Program on Law and Public Health.
Main Topics:

- History of human rights concepts, instruments and institutions since 1945
- The International Bill of Rights
- Global human rights institutions, including the role of NGOs
- Evaluating the impact of public health policies and programs on human rights
- Economic, social, and cultural rights and the right to health
- Biology, medicine and human subjects
- Mental illness, mental disability and human rights
- Human rights restrictions and communicable disease—the case of tuberculosis; the case of immunization

University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health
Berkeley, California
Course Title: Human Rights and Health
Instructor: Vincent Iacopino
Department: Health Science and Medicine
First Year Taught: 1994-95.
Other: The course is optional.
Main Topics:

- Historical concepts of human rights and health
- Global epidemiology of human rights violations
- The psychology of abuse
- Health consequences of human rights abuses
- Understanding and treating survivors of torture
- Economic, social and cultural rights: poverty, hunger and overpopulation; the effects of foreign debt and structural adjustment
- Health and women's rights
- Health and children's rights
- Effects of health policy on human rights—HIV, tobacco, reproductive rights
- Methods of documenting human rights violations
- Human rights education—the role of health professionals
- Contemporary human rights issues: universality, truth, justice, and reconciliation

Yale University, Yale School of Medicine
New Haven, Connecticut
Course Title: International Human Rights
Instructor: George Andreopoulos
Department: Epidemiology and Public Health
First Year Taught: 1994-95.
Other: The course is optional.
Main Topics:

- Intellectual and legal history of human rights
- Theories of rights, and the transition from natural rights to human rights
- Human rights mechanisms and instruments
- Universalism versus cultural relativism
- Contemporary challenges to the protection of human rights, including war crimes and genocide
- Humanitarian intervention and humanitarian assistance
- The role of NGOs
- Human security and the challenge of "complex emergencies"

Author'sComment: This course is not a course explicitly in health and human rights. It has been included because it is being taught exclusively within a department of international health by a faculty member attached to that department.

Outside of the United States:

Australia, Monash University, Victorian Universities Consortium MPH Program
Melbourne, Australia
Course Title: Health and Human Rights
Instructor: Bebe Loff and Michael Toole
Department: Macfarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research, Melbourne University
First Year Taught: 1994-95.
Other: The course is optional.
Main Topics

- Rights philosophy, human rights law
- Human rights and conflicts
- Indigenous peoples, health and human rights
- Mental health and human rights
- Access to health care
- Economic restructuring, health, and human rights
- Women's rights and children's rights, especially in the context of conflicts

México, Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública
Cuernavaca, Morelos, México
Course Title: AIDS and Human Rights
Instructor: Jaime Sepúlveda
First Year To Be Taught: 1996-97.
Other: The course is optional. Seminar format.
Main Topics:
The course is a seminar that examines the complexity of health and human rights issues engendered by AIDS.

References

1. J. Mann, L. Gostin, S. Gruskin, et al., "Health and Human Rights," *Health and Human Rights*, 1 (1) (1994):7-23.
2. N.F. Toubia, "From Health or Human Rights to Health and Human Rights: Where Do We Go From Here?," *Health and Human Rights*, 1 (2) (1995):136-141.
3. J.E. Osborne, "Health and Human Rights: An Inseparable Synergy," *Health and Human Rights*, 1 (2) (1995):142-151.
4. J. Mann, "Human Rights and the New Public Health," *Health and Human Rights*, 1 (3) (1995):229-233.
5. "SPH" will be used throughout to refer to accredited United States schools of public health as well as postgraduate public health training programs outside of the United States, whether in schools of public health, institutes of public health, or graduate departments of medical schools.
6. See, for example, A. Keller, S.K. Horn, S. Sopheap, et al., "Human Rights Education for Cambodian Health Professionals," *Health and Human Rights*, 1 (3) (1995):256-271. Physicians for Human Rights, the Bangladesh Ethical and Humanitarian Association, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and groups in India, South Africa and Zaire concerned with torture are just some examples of groups providing human rights training for health workers.
7. In 1993, Amnesty International commissioned a survey of human rights education in UK medical schools. Last year, a team from the University of Michigan School of Medicine began a similar study of United States medical schools.
8. A MEDLINE search going back to 1970 yields not a single paper surveying curricula globally. There are some regional and some narrowly topical discussions of curricula. Other papers cover single countries or schools; typically, these have been pleas for curricular reform, or announcements of reforms completed. A few papers offer globally applicable prescriptions for public health education. See especially A. Afifi and L. Breslow, "The Maturing Paradigm of Public Health," *Annual Review of Public Health*, 15 (1994):223-35, and M. Roemer "Higher Education for Public Health Leadership," *International Journal of Health Services*, 23 (1993):387-400.
9. World Health Organization, *World Directory of Schools of Public Health and Postgraduate Training Programmes in Public Health* (Geneva, 1985). WHO has invested considerable effort in an updated guide, and plans to make it available directly on the Internet, at its World Wide Web site.
10. For instance, the regional association most advanced in this regard, the Association of Schools of Public Health, which includes SPH in the United States, counts courses by major subject area; human rights are included in the "other" category, and thus cannot be tracked.
11. SPH: Boston University, Columbia University, Emory University, George Washington University, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, Loma Linda University, Saint Louis University, San Diego State University, State University of New York-Albany, Tulane University, University of Alabama-Birmingham, University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-Berkeley, University of Hawaii, University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of North Carolina-Chapel

Hill, University of Oklahoma, University of Pittsburgh, University of Puerto Rico, University of South Carolina, University of South Florida, University of Texas-Houston, University of Washington, and Yale University.

Non-SPH MPH programs: California State University at Fresno, School of Health and Social Work; East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, School of Health Sciences and Human Performance; East Tennessee State University, College of Public and Allied Health; Florida International University, College of Health; Hunter College of the City University of New York, School of Health Sciences; Illinois Benedictine College, Program in Public Health; Meharry Medical College, Division of Community Health Sciences; New York University School of Education, Department of Health Studies; Ohio State University College of Medicine and Graduate School, Graduate Programs in the Basic Medical Sciences, Department of Preventive Medicine; Rutgers University School of Planning and Public Policy, Department of Public Health; San Jose State University College of Applied Arts and Sciences, Department of Health Science; Sangamon State University School of Health and Human Services, Program in Public Health; University of Arizona, Graduate Program in Public Health; University of Kansas, Graduate Programs in the Basic Sciences, Department of Preventive Medicine; University of Northern Colorado, College of Health and Human Sciences. These fifteen surveyed programs are a fraction of the several dozen U.S. MPH programs in schools other than SPH. Eight of the fifteen are accredited by the Council for Education in Public Health (CEPH).

12. Countries surveyed were Angola, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Swaziland, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, United Kingdom, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

13. This reflects a long-standing tendency within the Anglo-American human rights community, yet health issues inevitably engage economic and social rights. On this last point, see J. Mann, L. Gostin, S. Gruskin, et al., see note 1.

14. Other than in ethics courses, human rights are reportedly addressed in courses on women and development, refugee health, reproductive health, and the health of vulnerable populations. For example, the University of Washington has required International Health concentrators to take a seminar containing a module entitled "Women, Equity, and Health."

15. J. Mann, L. Gostin, S. Gruskin, see note 1.