

'Vulnerability' and 'othering' during the COVID-19 pandemic

16th May 2022, 1.00PM (London time)

The COVID-19 pandemic has been marked by discourses of 'vulnerability' (e.g., identifying groups at increased risk of infection or disease) and practices of 'othering' (i.e., acts that target marginalized groups, often as if something is 'wrong' with them). For instance, some populations have been deemed 'vulnerable' due to socioeconomic factors beyond their control, which has often led to stigmatization, and whole countries have been blamed for negative outcomes, e.g., for the emergence of new variants of concern, which has often led to discrimination and exclusion. If we take the concepts of solidarity and justice seriously, we must consider how pandemic preparedness and response activities can proceed in a manner that avoids stigmatizing, blaming, and othering. This seminar will explore these ideas and will be followed up by additional seminars focusing on how 'vulnerability' and 'othering' have been experienced by specific population groups

Chair:

- [Dr Florencia Luna](#), FLACSO – CONICET, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Panel:

- [Dr Tamara Giles-Vernick](#), Unit Head, Anthropology & Ecology of Disease Emergence Unit, Institut Pasteur, 25-28 rue du Docteur Roux, 75724, Paris Cedex, France
- [Professor Thomas Shakespeare](#), International Centre for Evidence in Disability, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- [Dr Aqsa Shaikh](#), Department of Community Medicine, Hamdard Institute of Medical Science and Research, New Delhi, India.

The following questions will form the basis of the seminar's panel discussion. Seminar attendees are invited to submit questions in advance of the seminar when they register or during the live discussion.

1. It is often important to identify persons or populations at increased risk or identify sources of viral emergence or transmission. How ought we approach these activities in such that we avoid stigmatizing and othering?
2. How have discourses of vulnerability and practices of othering contributed to stigma and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What is meant by vulnerability? How should we talk about and address the needs of those who are at greater risk from infectious disease threats?
4. How has 'othering' manifested in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic? How can we avoid 'othering' in the ways we talk about and respond to the pandemic?