Andrei Sakharov Research Center  
Vytautas Magnus University

Program

Emotional Well-being and Social Solidarity during COVID-19

Third Leonidas Donskis Memorial Conference

Date: September 21, 13.00 AM - 17.00 P.M.
Location: Small Auditorium, Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas)

Organizers: American Initiative for Mental Health, Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry, Globaline Iniciativa Psichiatrijoje, Hamlet/GIP-UK

Sponsors: Mental Health Rights Human

The conference will be followed by a reception and the 2020 Leonidas Donskis Commemorative Concert at the Ciurlionis Gallery in Kaunas. For both registration is required. Limited seats are available.

Registration at www.sakharovcenter-vdu.eu
Mind the Gap

Emotional Well-being and Social Solidarity during COVID-19
Third Leonidas Donskis Memorial Conference

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world within weeks beyond recognition. The globalized world has been reduced to an archipelago of individual countries under varying levels of lock down and the prognosis is that the old will only return once a vaccine has been founded and a large segment of the world population has been vaccinated. While rules and regulations are gradually being eased, the fear of a second and maybe even third wave lurks. Rulers have used extraordinary powers to impose surveillance methods, and in some cases suspend democratic rule. Some argue that the pandemic has had grave repercussions for democracy, while others argue that the pandemic has in fact effectively limited the possibilities and power of authoritarian leaders.

What has become quite evident is the fact that the pandemic will have a serious effect on global mental health. This effect was unfortunately mostly ignored or negated on the outset, which was highlighted by the UN Secretary-General in his May 13, 2020 Policy Brief “Covid-19 and the Need for Action in Mental Health”, but now many believe that the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be a pandemic on its own accord. People with psychosocial disability find themselves in a very difficult situation, but also the millions whose future are uncertain and who face anxiety and depression or have suicidal thoughts will create an extra burden for the already battered health care services and economy in general. While now many service users stay away from professional help out of fear of infection, in the long run there is a chance services will be overrun. Students at institutions of higher education are heavily affected due to the uncertainty about career options, both in the short term e.g. studying abroad and in the long term because of the inevitable economic depression.

The Mind the Gap conference in memory of Leonidas Donskis focuses on these issues and will also be the launch of a Mind the Gap University Support Program initiated by Vytautas Magnus University and involving universities in a number of other countries.

The conference will be followed by a reception memory of Leonidas Donskis and the Annual Donskis Commemorative Concert at the M.K. Ciurlionis Gallery.

Program — Mind the Gap
Emotional Wellbeing and Social Solidarity during COVID-19

Date: Monday September 21st
Location: Small Auditorium Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Opening</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mr. Linas Linkevicius; Prof. Juozas Augustis; Prof. Sekhar Saxena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.20 - 13.45 PM</td>
<td><strong>Robert van Voren</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Mind the Gap Campaign; campaign overview and video clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.45 - 14.05 PM</td>
<td><strong>Dainius Puras:</strong>&lt;br&gt;COVID-19 and the Right to Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.05 - 14.25 PM</td>
<td><strong>Dovile Juodkaite:</strong>&lt;br&gt;The effect of COVID-19 restrictions on persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.45 - 15.15 PM</td>
<td>Coffee-break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.15 - 15.35 PM</td>
<td><strong>Charlene Sunkel (South Africa)</strong>&lt;br&gt;COVID-19 and mental health – a consumer perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.35 - 15.55 PM</td>
<td><strong>Sir Graham Thornicroft (United Kingdom)</strong>&lt;br&gt;COVID-19 and mental health – a global perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.55 - 16.15 PM</td>
<td><strong>Ineta Dabasinskiene</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mind the Gap University Platform: a new initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.15 - 17.00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.00 - 18.15 PM</td>
<td><strong>Reception</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Valdas Adamkus Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.30 - 20.00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Leonidas Donskis Commemorative Concert</strong>&lt;br&gt;M.K. Ciurlionis Gallery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Invitation/registration only:
Linas Linkevičius (opening speaker)

Linas Linkevičius has been Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania since December 2012. Before he was a member of the Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament, minister of National Defence from 1993 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004. He was the Lithuanian Permanent Representative to NATO from 2005 until 2011. He was then appointed Ambassador to Belarus, but was soon back in Lithuania to serve as Foreign Minister.

Juozas Augutis (opening speaker)

Professor Juozas Augutis graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics and Mechanics in Vilnius University. In 1986, he successfully defended his dissertation and earned the degree of Candidate of Mathematical Sciences. Until 1991, Prof. Augutis worked as Assoc. Prof. at the Dept. of General Subjects in Šiauliai Faculty of Kaunas Polytechnic Institute. From 1991 he worked at Vytautas Magnus University, from 2002 onwards as Professor of Mathematics and Statistics. In 2006, he became the Vice-Rector for Research and since 2009 he has been the head of the Energy Security Research Centre at the Lithuanian Energy Institute and VMU. Currently he is a member of VMU Senate and Council, and Rector of Vytautas Magnus University.

His research priorities include probability theory, risk analysis, system reliability, energy safety. He has published several books and more than 150 scientific publications. He is also a member of editorial boards of 2 prestigious scientific periodicals. He was elected expert member of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in 2006 and became its full member in 2011. Prof. Augutis has been awarded with the Lithuanian National Scientific Prize, the Zigmas Žemaitis Medal, and the Honorary Award for achievements in the energy field in Lithuania.

Shekhar Saxena (opening speaker)

Shekhar Saxena is Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health at the Department of Global Health and Population at the Havard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. A psychiatrist by training, he has served in the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1998. From 2010 to 2018 he was the Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the WHO. In 2017, he received the prestigious Leon Eisenberg Award from Harvard Medical School. Author of more than 300 academic papers, he functioned as an editor of the Lancet Series on Global Mental Health 2007 and 2011, and the Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development 2018. His expertise includes providing advice and technical assistance to policy makers on prevention and management of mental, developmental, neurological and substance use disorders and suicide prevention. He is a board member of the international foundation Human Rights in Mental Health -FGIP.

Robert van Voren

Robert van Voren (1959) is a Sovietologist by education. A graduate of Amsterdam University, he obtained his PhD at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (Lithuania) where he is Professor of Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies and Executive Director of the Andrei Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development. He is also Professor of Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies at Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Starting in 1977, he became active in the Soviet human rights movement. In 1980, he co-founded the International Association on Political Use of Psychiatry, which is now the international foundation “Human Rights in Mental Health-Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry”. Van Voren holds a number of positions on boards of organizations in the fields of human rights, mental health and prison reform. He has written extensively on Soviet issues, the Second World War, and issues related to mental health and human rights. More than a dozen of his books have been published.

Abstract

In his presentation Van Voren will present the Mind the Gap Campaign, focusing on social solidarity in spite of physical distancing, rather than social distancing and social isolation. The campaign is supported worldwide by 50 organizations with visuals available in 40 languages. Special campaigns have been developed for Lithuania, South-Africa and Ukraine, and examples of their campaign materials will be shown.
Dainius Pūras is a professor of child psychiatry and public mental health at Vilnius University, Lithuania. Since 2018 he is a director of the Human rights monitoring institute – NGO based in Lithuania. Among positions he was holding, he was a President of Lithuanian Psychiatric Association, Dean of Medical Faculty of Vilnius University, President of Baltic Association for Rehabilitation. During the years 2007-2011 Dainius Pūras was a member of the UN Committee on the rights of the child. During the years 2014 – 2020 he was serving as a UN Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health.

Prof. Pūras has been actively involved in national and international activities in the field of developing and implementing evidence-based and human rights based health-related policies and services, with special focus on children, persons with mental health conditions and other groups in vulnerable situations and issues related to promotion of mental health and prevention of all forms of violence. His main interest is management of change in the field of health-related services regionally and globally, with main focus on operationalization of human rights based approach through effective policies and services.

Abstract
All human rights are indivisible and interconnected. Right to physical and mental health cannot be effectively realized if other human rights are neglected or undermined. The history of mental health care and psychiatry warns us that selective efforts to address mental health conditions by “fixing disorders”, especially if this is done at expense of undermining human rights and freedoms, can have detrimental consequences to well-being of individuals and societies. In this context it is important to critically assess current global mental health situation and to acknowledge important elements of the systemic failure of status quo within mental healthcare systems. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to re-think the direction of mental health policies and practices and to question the effectiveness of investing in status quo. Firstly, it would be unwise to medicalize large number of cases of mental health conditions triggered by fear of being infected or subjected to effects of lockdowns, and to qualify such cases as a proof of increased number of mental illnesses. Secondly, it is obvious now more than ever before that the legacy of segregated psychiatric institutions should be abandoned.

Systemic obstacles for realization of the right to mental health have been identified. Among other social determinants (poverty, discrimination, violence in different settings), these are widely spread use of coercion and institutionalization, excessive use of biomedical interventions, power asymmetries between providers and users of services and biased use of knowledge and evidence in mental health care. These obstacles are even more evident and threatening nowadays, when global community is facing COVID-19 pandemic.

This public health crisis is a good opportunity for essential change in mental health policies and practices globally. To achieve this needed change, concerted efforts should be undertaken by all stakeholders to fully embrace human rights based approach in mental healthcare and to abandon legacy of reliance on institutional care, as well as on excessive medicalization of human feelings and diversity.

Dovilė Juodkaitė

Dovilė Juodkaitė is a lawyer who graduated from the Law Faculty of Vilnius University in 1998. She continued her professional training as a scholar at the Columbia University School of Law (2001-2002), in Public Interest Law Initiative program, focusing on human rights of people with mental disabilities. In 2004-2005 she participated in an Open Society institute Centre for Policy studies, International Policy fellowship program, under the Public Health, Mental disability Advocacy Program (MDAP). In 2011 Dovile Juodkaite received the International Diploma in Mental Health Law and Human Rights, organized by Indian Law Society in collaboration with World health Organisation WHO.

Since 2002 D. Juodkaite is actively working in Lithuania and abroad focusing on human rights and disability. She was involved in various international and national projects on human rights and disability, non-discrimination, mental health care, policy and law, guardianship issues, and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. She was involved in promoting UNCRPD, OPCAT and other international documents enhancing rights of persons with disabilities in Lithuania and other countries (Baltic countries, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia). She actively participated in development and reforming of national legislation, provided trainings, gave lectures and consultancy on the issues of the rights of persons with disabilities. Since 2010 Dovile Juodkaite provides input in various international desk researches, studies and interviews on the implementation of UNCRPD. She prepared training modules and delivered trainings on e.g. medical ethics, human rights, monitoring of human rights of persons with disabilities in long-term residential institutions and issues related to legal capacity and the right to supported decision making.

Since 2016 she provides qualification training courses for judges in Lithuania, organised by Lithuanian Court administration, introducing new human rights (of persons with disabilities, mental health patients) principals according to UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (including issues of legal capacity, access to justice, etc.). In 2017 she was selected as an Expert on the National WHO QualityRights Assessment Team at World Health Organization for human rights monitoring in social and medical closed type institutions (social care homes, psychiatric hospitals, etc.) in Lithuania. She has provided trainings for mental health specialists on WHO QualityRights monitoring instrument in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kenya.
Abstract

In her presentation, Dovile Juodkaite will focus on:

- Lockdown as a usual daily experiences for persons with disabilities
- Critical situations with stopping daily social and health services - people and families left alone
- Lockdown impact on persons with disabilities in institutions
- European disability forum requirements for EU institutions and national governments for including disability in dealing with COVID and recovery plans after pandemic
- Human right requirements in humanitarian situations according CRPD

Robertas Povilaitis

Robertas Povilaitis studied psychology at Vilnius University and graduated in 2000. He then did his training in group psychotherapy and received his PhD in psychology in 2008. From 1997 he worked at the Child Development Center and is currently Director of the NGO “Child Line” and Lecturer at Vilnius University. From 2007 until 2010 he was President of Lithuanian Psychological Association (2007 – 2010) and from 2010 until 2019 Secretary General of European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations. He is author of several scientific publications.

Robertas Povilaitis was elected as Person of Tolerance by “Sugihara Foundation - Diplomats for Life” in 2006 and in 2011 he received the Gučas Award of the Lithuanian psychological association (2011) for the work in the field of bullying and violence prevention in schools.

Abstract

The presentation will describe the experience of the helpline for children during the pandemic. The behaviour of children contacting Child Line changed – due to the lack of privacy in home environment there were less calls by telephone but there was a high demand in online emotional support. The helpline tried to respond to the increased need and expanded working hours of the chat service. There were also changes in the main reasons for children contacting to the helpline.

Charlene Sunkel

Charlene Sunkel is a leading South African voice for the rights of people with mental health problems. She works for the South African Federation for Mental Health as Program Manager for Advocacy and Development where she manages the South African Mental Health Advocacy Movement. She authored several papers from a service user’s perspective. She has written and produced theatre plays and a short feature film on mental disorders – to raise public awareness.

Ms Sunkel had been involved in the review and drafting of various policies and legislation in South Africa and provided technical assistance to international mental health related reports and documents. She serves on a number of national and international boards and committees, including: Editorial Advisory Board of the Lancet Psychiatry; Presidential Working Group on Disability; Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health; Disability Empowerment Concerns Trust; Mental Health and Human Rights FGIP; citiesRISE; Rural Mental Health Campaign; and amongst others.

Ms Sunkel is also the Principal Coordinator for the Movement for Global Mental Health. Ms Sunkel was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1991 which led to her passion for mental health advocacy and human rights, where she received a number of national and international awards for her work.

Abstract: implications for millions across the world

COVID-19 arrived causing serious physical health implications for millions across the world, yet many more have been impacted mentally. Much of the pandemic response focused on preparing health systems to deal with coronavirus infections, while mental health systems have not received much consideration and neither have those living with existing mental health conditions. Many persons with mental health condition, even before COVID-19 faced stigma and discrimination, segregation, abandonment, poor mental health services, and their voices being silenced. Since COVID-19 dawned upon us, persons with mental health conditions now face compounded challenges - lockdown within lockdown, isolation and mental health systems that are ill-prepared to address the mental health impact of COVID-19 now and beyond the pandemic.

Sir Graham Thornicroft

Sir Graham Thornicroft is Professor of Community Psychiatry at the Centre for Global Mental Health and the Centre for Implementation Science at King’s College London. He is also a Consultant Psychiatrist working in an early intervention community mental health team in South London. His areas of expertise include: mental health related stigma and discrimination, the development of community mental health services, cost-effectiveness evaluations of mental health treatments, and global mental health. He has published 30 books and over 580 peer-reviewed scientific papers.
**Abstract**

In his presentation Professor Thornicroft will refer to mental health impacts on:

- The general population
- people with pre-existing mental illness
- people who provide essential services and are at increased risk of infection and
- people who are infected by Covid-19

**Ineta Dabasinskiene**

Professor Ineta Dabašinskienė is Vice-Rector for International Relations at Vytautas Magnus University, Professor at the Department of Lithuanian Language, and Head of the Research Centre for Intercultural Communication and Multilingualism. Her research interests include psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics, studies of grammar, spoken language and pragmatics, language policy and multilingualism. She has coordinated a number of national and international research/educational projects, which have received international recognition for their quality, relevance and dissemination of innovative ideas.

Ineta Dabašinskienė has been on academic secondments at the universities of Poland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Russia, Croatia, and the USA. She has won research funding from UNESCO’s “Funds-in-Trust” programme, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Open Society Fund Lithuania as well as Fulbright and Fulbright Alumni scholarships. As an internationally recognized researcher, she has published several monographs and a number of scholarly articles in Lithuanian and international scientific journals, has co-edited research studies published by international publishing houses, and is a member of editorial boards of several national and international scientific journals.

**Abstract**

Professor Dabašinskienė will be introducing the international Mind the Gap University Program that is currently under development and will focus on research with regard to the socio-economic and political effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and emotional well-being among the student population. The University Program is supported by several universities across Europe.

**Leonidas Donskis Memorial Conference**

Leonidas Donskis was born on August 13, 1962, in Klaipėda, Lithuania. Donskis graduated from Lithuanian State Conservatoire (now Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre), majoring in philology and theatre, and then pursued his graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania. Having received his first doctorate in philosophy from the University of Vilnius, he later earned his second doctorate in social and moral philosophy from the University of Helsinki, Finland.

Leonidas Donskis was a philosopher, political theorist, historian of ideas, social analyst, and political commentator. As a public figure in Lithuania, he acted as a defender of human rights and civil liberties. In 2004, Donskis was awarded by the European Commission the title of the Ambassador for Tolerance and Diversity in Lithuania. From 2009 to 2014 Leonidas was a Lithuanian Member of the European Parliament. He was a human rights coordinator of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group.

Until his election as a Member of European Parliament Leonidas Donskis was Professor of Political Science at Vytautas Magnus University and from 2005 to 2009 he served as Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy. In addition, he acts as Docent of Social and Moral Philosophy at the University of Helsinki, and as Extraordinary Visiting Professor of Cultural Theory at Tallinn University, Estonia. After the term of the European Parliament Leonidas Donskis returned to academic activities.

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Leonidas researched and lectured in the USA, Great Britain, and Europe. His main scholarly interests lie in philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, philosophy of literature, philosophy of the social sciences, civilization theory, political theory, history of ideas, and studies in Central and East European thought.

Donskis published widely in international refereed journals, and is the author or editor of more than thirty books, half of them in English. Donskis's works were translated into Danish, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Romanian and Ukrainian.
Third Leonidas Donskis Memorial Concert

21st September 2020, 18.30 at M.K. Ciurlionis Gallery
(Putvinskio st. 55, Kaunas)

Performance by the New Idea Chamber Orchestra
(Naujų idėjų kamerinis orkestras NIKO)

Due to COVID-19 a very limited number of seats, registration required at
www.sakharovcenter-vedu.eu