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Understanding the stakes in children's idioms of distress

Abstract Ria Reis

Emotional distress and symptoms of mental illness are expressed in different ways in different cultures, sometimes through specific cultural idioms of distress. These cultural expressions and idioms may complicate clinical interactions between patients and health care providers and hamper effective diagnostic and treatment trajectories. In case of (refugee) children these complications are even more pronounced as their (mental) health problems may be more complex, whereas professionals may lack the cultural competences for accurate diagnosis and adequate referral.

In my lecture I will focus on children's cultural idioms of distress. I will discuss the vulnerabilities that give rise to new forms of child idioms of distress in marginalised and deprived communities worldwide; how children learn to articulate their social suffering through embodied forms of behavior relevant to their local life-worlds, and how they mobilize their families and communities' response.

The general aim of my lecture is to discuss how culture shapes expressions of distress in children and what is at stake for children when they show collective symptoms of distress.