

Mental Health research in Brazil: through the looking-glass

*“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.
“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the cat: “we’re all mad here.
I’m mad. You’re mad.” “How do you know that I’m mad?” said Alice.
“You must be,” said the cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.”*

Lewis Carroll, 1865

Mental Health research in the context of Collective Health in Brazil has been increasing significantly in recent years. The output is to be found in the journals of the area, and even spilling over into publications in related fields such as psychology, psychiatry, the social sciences in general, and others. In recent years, there have also been special editions devoted to this theme, as well as the launch of new magazines and even a recent issue of the prestigious journal *Lancet*, in which the Brazilian Mental Health system was the object of analysis and praise.

The early texts, initially in the form of theses and unpublished material considered epoch-making, proposed ethical and renovating imperatives. The Brazilian Psychiatric Reform indubitably altered day-to-day practices, expanded services and impacted on the configuration of the academic field. For this reason, today, defining ourselves as being opposed to asylums is still as important as before, but it is no longer sufficient. New problems and issues are calling for research. As scientists, it is our ethical and political duty not only to proclaim that we reject this inhumane and exclusionary way of dealing with psychological distress. We are also compelled to say what practices we recommend and to argue in their favor by producing new evidence.

These issues assert themselves with renewed intensity at the current juncture, as it is necessary to stress to the funding agencies themselves the pressing need to foster research in Mental Health. The presence of specific notices by CNPq and foundations that fund research can be detected behind this increase in scientific production and several of the articles gathered here. We can clearly see the fertility of empirical studies, of scientific thought and of innovation in practices.

Our field reflects a certain methodological eclecticism, in which research of a qualitative nature, ethnographies, hermeneutic and interpretive studies, mixed designs, participatory and evaluative research and classical studies of an epidemiological stamp all intersect, albeit without sacrificing the rigor and traditions that theoretically support the field. Amazingly, we venture to say that in Mental Health the partnership among researchers is more common than in academia in general, which may have its origins in the long-standing common militancy, based on ethical principles such as those of non-exclusion. We would point out here that Brazilian Mental Health researchers often cite each other, which does not happen as often in Public Health (this fact is seen as an impediment to improving the impact indicators of the publications).

More researchers involved in services, more funding to foster research, increased production in terms of publications: anyone reading this may be tempted to think that we are describing paradise. Let us not delude ourselves. There are many challenges ahead. Among the main ones (honoring the connection between research and practice), is the need to forge a strong alliance between users and academia, to empower us to fight against the stigma, to assist in our civic participation with people afflicted by psychic distress. For this, we need to come to a basic consensus about what good practices in the area should be, and reject the increasing hyper-medicalization of life! With respect to the scientific and academic community, these topics are still in their infancy. Our area shows the vigor and vitality that are the hallmark of nascent problematic fields. The reality points to the relevance and urgency of such studies. This is what many of us, namely the authors of this volume of *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, have been working towards, in our firm belief that “very few things indeed were really impossible” (Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s adventures in wonderland & through the looking glass*. New York: Penguin Group; 1960).

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