

The place of human and social sciences in health emergencies

The social and humanitarian repercussions of health emergencies in Latin American countries associated with the biological, social and cultural life of the populations of the region are the central theme of this edition. Emerging events are conceived here in three complementary dimensions, namely the ontological, temporal and ethical aspects.

In the ontological dimension, events that trigger biological and environmental repercussions, and the resulting political, social and individual effects, are evaluated. At the same time, social structures and processes that precede the origin and development of events, which, in turn, transform or exacerbate existing problems, are analyzed. Health emergencies are considered to affect reality as a total social phenomenon, in the sense constructed by Mauss (2008)¹. In this respect, they affect the life of the individual (in its biological, emotional and relational complexity) and of society, including its organizational aspects.

In the temporal dimension, events have immediate, medium, or long-term repercussions. The texts presented here emphasize the importance of actions and strategies to contain and minimize impacts and protect affected populations and territories, taking into consideration the perspectives of duration, which can affect existing, but also future generations and modify social organization as a whole.

In the ethical dimension, the benefits of interventions are analyzed, linking them to individual and collective rights, emphasizing actions, policies and conceptions of strategies that encompass preparation, response and minimization of suffering in State initiatives with social participation.

The concepts and proposals of the human and social sciences contribute both to analyze the social and humanitarian repercussions of health emergencies and to overcome them. It is important to emphasize that this type of contribution is subsumed, as if it had a supporting role or was considered common sense, in view of the epidemiological and biomedical bias dominant in the narratives about public health emergencies. However, the social and human sciences have never been so necessary for understanding reality as in a pandemic such as COVID-19.

An integrated work is called for, as it is necessary to understand health emergencies in their historical roots and in a contextualized way from the regional and social standpoint and in what affects people, the community, and their perceptions about them. Biomedical and individualistic universalism has already been excessively criticized and it is in response to this that the theoretical and political field of public health has been created. In this context, the human and social sciences not only present themselves as a multifactorial dimension of the health and disease process, but also as an area of knowledge that is fundamental and integral to reflection and action. It is at the core of Latin American social medicine and Brazilian health reform, which have become lenses through which the health problems of the region's populations are understood and acted upon. It is also on these foundations that the SUS was built, based on law, equity, comprehensiveness, and social participation², within a multidisciplinary approach that includes clinical practice, epidemiology and the social issue.

This edition brings together some contributions from the human and social sciences of Latin American researchers. The relevance of the evidence presented, and the coping and protection strategies are highlighted, showing that it is necessary to have clear and comprehensive proposals in all phases of health emergencies: from preparation to responses and health recovery processes.

Concurrently, it is necessary to cultivate an active and effective human and social science, capable of understanding people's suffering and providing emphatic responses, in an integrated approach with epidemiology, clinical practice and the areas dedicated to infectious diseases.

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