



20th Biennial Congress: Cambridge, UK, Thurs 8th - Sat 10th September

45 Years & Counting: A Guide to our Section

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Professor emeritus Anthony Mann will give a special seminar on this paper during our 20th Congress. Please join this lunchtime seminar from 12:30pm – 13:15pm on Friday 9 September, 2022, in Lecture Room 2.

Background to development of the Section

In 1972, Heinz Häfner (Mannheim), Erik Stromgren (Aarhus) and John K Wing (London) founded an informal European committee to further psychiatric epidemiology. Five years later, in 1977, the Steering Committee of the "European Symposia on Social Psychiatry" organised its first meeting: "Estimating Needs for Mental Care" held in Mannheim, Germany. Three symposia were subsequently held in Aarhus, Denmark (1979), Hanasaari, Finland (1982), and Copenhagen, Denmark (1986).

At the 4th European Congress of the Association of European Psychiatrists (AEP) in Strasbourg, France (October 1988), the "Epidemiology and Social Psychiatry" section was founded. The first meeting of the Section Committee (seven members of the Steering Committee of the European Symposia on Social Psychiatry, and nine members suggested by the AEP-Committee) took place on October 21, 1988 in Strasbourg. The following members were elected: Chairman

(Heinz Häfner), Deputy Chairman (Jules Angst), Treasurer (Martin H Schmidt), Secretary (Siegfried Weyerer).

Since that congress, the Section has organised its own symposium on psychiatric epidemiology and mental health services for subsequent EPA congresses. More importantly, from 1977 to 2020 our Section has organised 20 free standing meetings (see Appendix 1): three each in Denmark, Germany and the UK, two each in Austria and France, and one each in Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and The Netherlands. The Section Chair changes every four years (see Appendix 2).

In addition to our Section, three major international organisations in the field of psychiatric epidemiology organise meetings on a regular basis: the International Federation of Psychiatric Epidemiology (IFPE), the Section of Public Health of the World Psychiatric Association, and the European Network for Mental Health Service Evaluation (ENMESH). Several members of our Section are also active members of these organisations. With regard to date and topic of planned conferences, we have tried to avoid overlap.

Current status of the Section

The epidemiology and social psychiatry section meetings are the most durable and consistently well attended of the EPA, usually with 200 participants or more. It is important to note that to date local organisers continue to bear sole responsibility for all financial matters to do with the meeting, usually without the assistance of professional event management organisations. Over the years we have tried to keep costs (accommodations and congress fee) low, to enable a large number of young researchers to attend.

In general, the sessions begin Wednesday afternoon with educational courses and workshops for earlier career colleagues and end Saturday noon. Our 20th Biennial Congress, which emerges after a two year postponement induced by the global COVID-19 pandemic, foregoes the Wednesday afternoon workshops for Early Career Researchers. These are replaced by an ECR social event on the Wednesday afternoon, and a variety of new ECR initiatives including the ECR Prize and ECR Rapid-Fire talks.

Strengths of our Success

There are three main strengths that have underpinned this success:

1. The policy of all chairmen with local meeting organisers has been to enable as many participants as possible to have an active role, whether as session chairperson, speaker in plenary or parallel sessions or presenting a poster. Submissions for oral presentations are usually grouped according to topic into a parallel session. Plenary speakers are usually a mixture of the well-known and those beginning to publish widely. If there is competition for a speaking slot, the organiser will favour the younger researcher or one from a former Eastern European country where epidemiological research is in its infancy. It is the knowledge that young researchers will always have a prominent place that has kept a loyal international following over these forty plus years - providing an invaluable opportunity to cut teeth in front of a friendly international audience.
2. The meetings were intended forty years ago to be fora for presentation of epidemiological studies and for social psychiatry research. The latter features less now at our meetings as it has morphed into health service research, which is now the focus of other meetings such as ENMESH. On the other hand epidemiological research has developed. Descriptive, outcome and risk factor studies are still submitted, perhaps of a new disorder or from a new country. Striking over this time has been the growth in the number of submissions of work in child and adolescent psychiatry and among older age adults. Statistical methods have advanced, so our meetings often include workshops led by an expert to help bring participants up to date. Cochrane reviews and other meta analyses are now presented. In recent years, following a welcome trend to open up records to researchers, results from data set analyses studying the impact of psychiatric disorders on the wider health care system, social security and the economy are being carried out and now represented in the section meetings.
3. The section meetings are by common consent reckoned to be friendly and supportive for those attending. Perhaps in contrast to colleagues in current biological research there is less need to be competitive, to be the first to report something. Data sets take a while to be accumulated and results usually add a layer to knowledge but rarely are a leap forward. Findings from one data set benefit by being revalidated in another. Collaboration is thus key and the meetings provide the forum for researchers in a particular topic to meet and set up a future collaboration.

The meetings are usually held in European university cities, a delight to explore as many are not on the usual tourist tracks. The conference dinner is taken seriously, often featuring local cuisine and wines. Being entertaining in front of 200 expectant colleagues is perhaps the most daunting part of the chairman's tenure, as he/she has to give the after dinner speech thanking the local organisers.

Conclusion

During the past 40 years, the field of psychiatric epidemiology has grown and developed considerably. Our Section's biennial symposia represent the largest gathering of psychiatric epidemiologists in Europe. They provide an excellent forum for frank discussions about the new directions in and issues related to our profession, particularly for young researchers.

Appendix 1: Site of section meetings

1. Mannheim/Germany (Heinz Häfner), March 28-30, 1977: Estimating Needs for Mental Care.
2. Aarhus/Denmark (Erik Stromgren), September 26-28, 1979: Epidemiological Research as a Basis for the Organization of Extramural Psychiatry.
3. Hanasaari/Finland (Kalle Achté), September 12-15, 1982: Research in Mental Health of the Elderly. Epidemiology, Prevention and Services Research.
4. Copenhagen/Denmark (Marianne Kastrup), June 3-5, 1986: Topic not specified.

Strasbourg (France), October 21, 1988: Founding of AEP-Section "Epidemiology and Social Psychiatry".

5. Manchester/UK (David Goldberg), April 12-14, 1989: Social Psychiatry and Public Health.
6. Zurich/Switzerland (Jules Angst), April 8-10, 1992: Topic not specified.
7. Vienna/Austria (Heinz Katschnig), April 7-9, 1994: Quality of Life and Disabilities in Mental Disorders.
8. Cambridge/UK (Anthony H Mann), April 11-13, 1996: The Role of Epidemiology in Psychiatry: Current Perspectives and Future Trends.
9. Beaune/France (Jean-Pierre Lepine), April 16-18, 1998: Epidemiology of Mental Disorders. Towards Integration and Psychosocial Factors.
10. Budapest/Hungary (Janos Füredi), April 6-8, 2000: From Epidemiology to Prevention.

11. Aarhus/Denmark (Povl Munk-Jorgensen), April 17-20, 2002: New Psychiatric Epidemiology.
12. Mannheim/Germany (Siegfried Weyerer), June 23-26, 2004: Determinants and Consequences of Psychiatric Illness.
13. Bordeaux/France (Helene Verdoux), June 14-17, 2006: Prevention and Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders.
14. Dubrovnik/Croatia (Veljko Djordjevic and Aran Tomac), June 11-14, 2008: Topic not specified.
15. Bergen/Norway (Arnstein Mykletun), June 16-19, 2010: Topic not specified.
16. Maastricht/The Netherlands (Jim van Os), June 13-16, 2012: Closing in on the Envirome in Mental Health.
17. Ulm/Germany (Thomas Becker), May 21-24, 2014: Disease Burden and Service Delivery.
18. Gothenburg/Sweden (Ingmar Skoog), November 30-December 3, 2016: Social Psychiatry and Epidemiology in a Changing World.
19. Vienna/Austria (Johannes Wancata), April 4-7, 2018: Topic not specified.
20. Cambridge/UK (James Kirkbride), September 8-10, 2022: Public Mental Health Re-Imagined: A Roadmap Towards Global Equity

Appendix 2: Chairpersons/Publications

The Section Committee has elected the following Chairpersons: Heinz Häfner (1988-1992), Jules Angst (1992-1996), Anthony Mann (1996-2002), Povl Munk-Jorgensen (2002-2010), Thomas Becker (2010-2014), Robert Stewart (2014-2018), and Arnstein Mykletun (since 2018).

Occasionally selected contributions to our symposia have been published in a book, e.g. Goldberg D, Tantom D (Eds) *The Public Health Impact of Mental Disorder*. Hogrefe & Huber Publisher 1990; Katschnig H, Sartorius N (Eds) *Quality of Life*. John Wiley 1996.