

## Symposium

📅 Sat. Sep 27, 2025 2:10 PM - 3:40 PM JST | Sat. Sep 27, 2025 5:10 AM - 6:40 AM UTC 🏢 Session Room 5 (Conference Room A)

## **[Symposium 69] Global Mental Health in a Polarized World: Building Bridges, Sharing Solutions.**

Moderator: Itsuo Asai (Heart Clinic Medical Corporation)

[SY-69]

Global Mental Health in a Polarized World: Building Bridges, Sharing Solutions.

Itsuo Asai<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Irfan<sup>2,5</sup>, Azaad Kassam<sup>3</sup>, Kenneth Fung<sup>4</sup> (1.Heart Clinic Medical Corporation(Japan), 2.Peshawar Medical College(Pakistan), 3.University of Ottawa(Canada), 4.University of Toronto(Canada), 5.President-Elect, World Association of Cultural Psychiatry(Pakistan))

[SY-69-01]

Global Mental Health Equity:  
Addressing Barriers and Building Sustainable Solutions

\*Muhammad Irfan (Department of Mental Health, Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Peshawar Medical College, Riphah International University, Islamabad(Pakistan))

[SY-69-02]

Bridging Cultural and Biomedical Paradigms: An Inter-Modality Approach to Mental Health Services in Ethiopia through Holy Water Practices

\*Yonas Baheretibeb Alemu<sup>1</sup>, Sam Law<sup>2</sup>, Lisa Andermann<sup>2</sup> (1.Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), 2.University of Toronto(Canada))

[SY-69-03]

Serving the Mental Health Needs of a Culturally and Geographically Diverse Faith Community

\*Azaad Kassam (University of Ottawa(Canada))

[SY-69-04]

Cultural Psychiatry & Global Mental Health: Bridging Perspectives for Inclusive Care

\*Kenneth Po-Lun Fung (University of Toronto(Canada))

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Keywords : Global Health、Mental Health、Mental Health Services、Health Status Disparities、Cultural Competency

Global mental health continues to face substantial structural and cultural challenges. This symposium convenes five international experts to discuss how inclusive, sustainable, and context-aware approaches—culturally and geopolitically—can advance mental health equity worldwide.

Prof. Muhammad Irfan (Pakistan) begins by pointing out key barriers to achieving mental health equity, such as access gaps, stigma, and systemic inequalities in low- and middle-income countries. He stresses the importance of culturally rooted and community-empowered approaches to build sustainable care systems.

Dr. Yonas Bahertibeb(Ethiopia) notes that mental health services are often fragmented, with traditional healing practices and biomedical systems functioning separately. Using Ethiopia as an example, he underscores missed opportunities for integration and highlights the urgent need for culturally grounded collaboration.

Dr. Azaad Kassam (Canada) shares a case study from the Ismaili faith community, which spans 22 countries. Through collaboration with the Aga Khan University Brain and Mind Institute, a global mental health course was developed to support culturally diverse professionals. His presentation emphasizes the importance of pluralism, cultural safety, and capacity-building as essential components for creating resilient systems.

Dr. Ruta Karaliuniene (Germany) discusses disaster situations—such as conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics—in resource-limited areas, where psychiatrists play crucial roles in trauma response and ongoing psychosocial recovery. Her insights highlight the ethical and structural challenges encountered during crises.

Prof. Kenneth Fung (Canada) offers a critical view from cultural psychiatry, warning against blindly applying Western models. He advocates for "reverse innovation" by learning from practices in low-resource settings—such as task-sharing, storytelling, and arts-based care—and encourages mutual, two-way learning to develop culturally relevant global mental health strategies.

Together, these presentations outline a global framework for advancing equitable mental health by emphasizing cultural humility, community engagement, and mutual knowledge exchange.



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**[SY-69-01] Global Mental Health Equity:  
Addressing Barriers and Building Sustainable Solutions**

\*Muhammad Irfan (Department of Mental Health, Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Peshawar Medical College, Riphah International University, Islamabad(Pakistan))

Keywords : Global Mental Health、 Mental Health Equity、 Sustainable Solutions

This presentation focuses on the critical challenges in achieving mental health equity globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. It highlights systemic barriers such as limited access to care, cultural stigmas, and resource disparities, while emphasizing innovative, culturally sensitive, and sustainable solutions to bridge these gaps. Strategies for fostering collaboration and empowering communities to create equitable mental health systems will also be discussed.

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Moderator: Itsuo Asai (Heart Clinic Medical Corporation)

### **[SY-69-02] Bridging Cultural and Biomedical Paradigms: An Inter-Modality Approach to Mental Health Services in Ethiopia through Holy Water Practices**

\*Yonas Baheretibeb Alemu<sup>1</sup>, Sam Law<sup>2</sup>, Lisa Andermann<sup>2</sup> (1.Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), 2.University of Toronto(Canada))

Keywords : Collaborative Care、 Holistic Approaches、 Community Engagement

In Africa, over 80% of individuals seek mental health care from traditional healers, highlighting their vital role in the mental health landscape. This reliance necessitates a collaborative framework that integrates traditional healing practices with biomedical approaches; however, progress remains limited despite advocacy from the UN and WHO. Often, these systems operate in isolation and, at times, in direct opposition to one another. This presentation delves into the complex social and cultural contexts of mental health care in Ethiopia, focusing specifically on the potential synergy between traditional practices, such as Holy Water rituals performed by Orthodox Church priests, and biomedical psychiatry. By examining a case of collaboration between these two modalities, we will analyze the cultural beliefs and practices that shape mental health care in Ethiopia and how these factors influence patient experiences and treatment-seeking behaviors. The presentation will also highlight the unique roles and contributions of both traditional healers and biomedical professionals in addressing mental health conditions, fostering mutual respect and understanding. In addition, we will address the challenges that impede effective collaboration, including stigma, inadequate training, and differing treatment philosophies. Ultimately, we will discuss the benefits of an inter-modality approach, emphasizing the potential for improved patient outcomes, enhanced accessibility of care, and the overall enrichment of mental health services through a culturally attuned, integrative framework. By fostering dialogue between cultural and biomedical paradigms, this presentation aims to illuminate pathways toward a more cohesive and effective mental health care system in Ethiopia, promoting a collaborative approach that respects and incorporates both traditional and modern practices.

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### **[SY-69-03] Serving the Mental Health Needs of a Culturally and Geographically Diverse Faith Community**

\*Azaad Kassam (University of Ottawa(Canada))

Keywords : Culture、 Faith、 Global、 Training、 Collaboration

The Ismaili community traverses multiple countries, cultures, and languages served by a common leadership and ethic. In this session, I will describe the work of a Global Mental Health Task Force that was formed to support the well-being and resilience of this dynamic community. Connections were fostered in order to assess local cultural idioms of distress and mental health needs, followed by collaborative efforts to build capacity. In partnership with the Aga Khan University Brain and Mind Institute, a global mental health course was developed and delivered in person to mental health professionals coming from 22 jurisdictions. The project is built on a foundation of collaboration, cultural safety, humility, pluralism, trauma-informed care, contextuality, best practice, and sustainability.

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### [SY-69-04] Cultural Psychiatry & Global Mental Health: Bridging Perspectives for Inclusive Care

\*Kenneth Po-Lun Fung (University of Toronto(Canada))

Keywords : global mental health、 cultural psychiatry、 inclusion

Mental disorders remain among the top ten leading causes of disease burden worldwide, with little reduction since 1990. A significant treatment gap persists between the prevalence of mental disorders and the proportion of individuals receiving care, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The field of global mental health has emerged to address these disparities. However, from a cultural psychiatry perspective, there are critical concerns regarding the dominance of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) populations in shaping mental health research, diagnostic criteria, and treatment models. Without careful consideration, there is a risk of exporting culturally specific concepts and interventions that may not align with diverse sociocultural contexts.

To address these challenges, global mental health has increasingly integrated strategies such as task-shifting/sharing, cultural adaptation, and implementation science. There is also growing recognition of the role of social determinants of health, the continuum between mental health and illness, consideration of the care gap, and the importance of cultural safety and cultural competence in service delivery. Furthermore, the field acknowledges the need for bidirectional learning—recognizing that high-income countries (HICs) have much to learn from LMICs, especially in resource-limited settings, and that marginalized populations within HICs face similar structural barriers to care.

In addition, global challenges—including war, pandemics, climate change, and the rise of nationalism and populism—continue to shape the trajectory of global mental health. This presentation will explore how cultural psychiatry can deepen the understanding of global mental health and inform its evolution. It will also highlight why cultural psychiatry and cultural psychiatrists need to actively engage with global mental health to foster equitable, contextually relevant mental health care worldwide.

**Learning Objectives:** 1. **Reflect on the interplay between cultural psychiatry and global mental health** by examining how Western-based mental health frameworks influence diagnosis, treatment, and research, and identifying strategies to promote culturally informed care. 2. **Discuss approaches to reducing the global mental health treatment gap** through interventions such as task-shifting, cultural adaptation, and implementation science while considering their ethical and cultural implications. 3.

**Discuss the impact of global challenges on mental health** (e.g., war, pandemics, climate change, nationalism) and explore how cultural psychiatry can contribute to developing resilient, inclusive mental health responses across diverse settings.