(Virtual) NR40 / Biopolitics, Health Surveillance, and the Legal Regulation of Gendered Bodies

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel offers a critical, interdisciplinary examination of acute governance challenges in Global South health systems. It aims to investigate how the evolving exercise of biopower and governmentality is now mediated by technological governance, manifest through digital surveillance, algorithmic decision-making, and mandatory data collection. Addressing the conference theme, “Public Policy Praxis in the Global South,” the panel directly engages the law-policy intersection, challenging the neutrality of public health policies that often exacerbate existing gendered and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Our work builds on post-colonial governmentality studies but goes further by systematically linking digital health adoption to the legal regulation of women’s and gender-diverse individuals’ bodily autonomy. Moving beyond the general critique of digital inequality, we focus on data justice and the specific policy mechanisms through which surveillance is gendered. Contributions will analyse the translation of global health security into localized biopolitical practices, establishing the Global South not merely as a case study, but as a critical laboratory generating theoretical insights into the legal legitimization or resistance of a "biometric citizenship."

The panel is committed to exploring the methodological innovations necessary for tracing opaque power-knowledge relations in private sector-led digital health initiatives, thereby building critical capacity among scholars and policymakers to mitigate the ethical and political risks inherent in this new landscape.

Central Research Questions for the Policy Track:

Theoretical/Critical: How do contemporary health surveillance technologies in the Global South re-inscribe colonial or patriarchal forms of biopolitical control, offering new theoretical frameworks for understanding technological governance?
Empirical/Legal: What are the key law-policy intersections regarding algorithmic bias in public health, and how can national data protection regimes be reformed to ensure bodily autonomy and human rights in digital spaces?
Methodological: What new theoretical and ethnographic approaches are necessary to trace the opaque power-knowledge relations inherent in private sector-led digital health initiatives?

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite theoretical, empirical, and methodological papers that engage with, but are not limited to, the following themes:

Technological Governance and Biopower: The application of Foucauldian or feminist theories to analyse algorithmic bias, mandatory registration systems, and digital health tracking in public services.

Law-Policy Intersections and Bodily Autonomy: Critical legal analysis of data protection laws, health information policies, and their differential impact on gendered populations and SRHR in the Global South.

Data Justice and Digital Inequality: Examining how surveillance is specifically gendered and the disproportionate vulnerabilities faced by marginalized communities in digital health ecosystems.

Post-Colonial and Interdisciplinary Frameworks: Utilizing methodologies from medical anthropology, sociology, and political economy to trace opaque power-knowledge relations in state or private sector-led health initiatives.

Theoretical Insights from the Global South: Submissions that develop new concepts or approaches relevant

to public policy research by analysing localized practices of health regulation.