

Medicalization of society, a social threat?!

Once upon a time there were men who had bald heads and wore a hat, there were children who were uncontrollable and there were adults with lacking confidence. Nowadays these descriptions might be attributed to diseases, entities with names, diagnostic criteria, and an increasing array of therapeutic options.

The definition of medicalization is as follows: to identify or categorize a condition or behaviour as being a disorder requiring medical treatment or intervention.

The term refers to the process by which certain events or characteristics of everyday life become medical issues, and thus come within the purview of doctors and other health professionals to engage with, study, and treat. [Faith McLellan, the Lancet 2007]

What are its causes and effects? Who benefits from medicalization, and who is harmed? What, if anything, should be done about it? Answers to these questions would have seemed quite obvious in the 1970s, when the term entered academic and medical publications: medicalization, the expansion of medical authority into the domains of everyday existence, was promoted by doctors and was therefore a force to be rejected in the name of specific kinds of liberation. Ivan Illich, a philosopher, argued that the medical establishment posed a "threat to health" through the production of clinical, social, and cultural "iatrogenesis". For Illich, Western medicine's notion of issues of healing, ageing, and dying as medical illnesses effectively "medicalised" human life, rendering individuals and societies less able to deal with these "natural" processes [Jonathan M. Metzl, Rebecca M Herzig, the Lancet 2007].

This workshop on medicalization is of special interest for all who are interested in expanding their views through learning about the opinion of others. The subject will be introduced by prof. dr. Dehue, a national and international expert in this field. Then different points of views will be discussed, also in perspective to other countries.

What do you think about this? Are you familiar with this phenomenon? Is this also an issue in your country? This, and more will be discussed by during this workshop organised by the the Royal Dutch Medical Association Groningen (KNMG district-Groningen).