

Knowledge and power. The practices of forensic psychiatrists relating to compulsory social measures. A comparative study of the cantons of Vaud, Geneva and Valais (1940–the present).

This project is part of the ‘Assistance and coercion: past, present and future’ National Research Programme (NRP 76). This NRP’s main objective is to analyse the characteristics and effects of social measures that undermine or protect the integrity of individuals. As one of about twenty projects selected by the Swiss National Science Foundation, our study aims to investigate the place of psychiatrists’ forensic reports in decision-making processes. A forensic report is a required document when appointing a legal guardian or interning someone in a psychiatric institution (‘compulsory social measures’). It decides on aspects such as responsibility, the potential danger to self or others and the need for care. What knowledge does a forensic report produce and what treatments and institutions (hospitals, homes, different sorts of prison) does it recommend? How does the psychiatrist describe the conduct that justifies restricting someone’s freedom for their own safety or the safety of others? How do those who have been the subject of a report react to the decisions imposed on them? To answer these questions while considering historical and geographical variations, the study covers a long period (1940–the present) and compares three French-speaking cantons (Vaud, Geneva and Valais). From a methodological point of view, in addition to studying institutional archives and various other sources, we will do a quantitative analysis of 600 forensic reports and a qualitative analysis of a smaller corpus of cases having incurred both civil and criminal measures. Our broad hypothesis is that the practices of forensic reports reflect and influence socio-political responses to transgressive behaviours. It remains to be ascertained whether the evolution of these reports represents social progress in

helping those affected by compulsory social measures.

Research team

Cristina Ferreira, principal applicant,
HESAV

Jacques Gasser, co-applicant, CHUV,
UNIL

Ludovic Mangué, HESAV

Sandrine Maulini, HESAV

Mikhaël Moreau, HESAV

Mirjana Farkas, HESAV

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