

DAILY LIFE EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF VIRAL EXPOSURE, PROTECTIVE PRACTICES, AND THE MAKING OF VULNERABILITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF LIVING CONDITIONS IN CANTON DE VAUD, SNSF, PNR78 (2020-2022)

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What makes people vulnerable in pandemic times, the virus and/or other socioeconomic and environmental factors? As Switzerland, progressively releases Covid-19 confinement, some groups of the population emerge as more affected than others by viral exposure and protection measures. As recalled by the National COVID-19 Science Task Force (NCS-TF), “the effects of the pandemic and of pandemic response are likely to play out in an unequal manner not only along gender lines, but also in an intersectional manner along other categories such as social class, sexuality, ethnicity, migration, etc.”. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, social relations and the living environment have emerged as playing a crucial role in risk of exposure, viral transmission, and protection, as well as possible inequalities resulting from them. (Semi)confinement, so-called “social distancing”, and masks wearing, aim to create physical barriers to contain viral propagation, but target also how people relate to each other. The jointure of biological and social levels raise questions about the impact of professional activities and family/social relations in spreading the virus (Bayer and Kuhn 2020) as well as about the unintended effects of protective practices on individuals, such as social isolation, loneliness (Miller et al. 2020) or domestic violence (developing et al. 2020; Lima et al. 2020), and on their rights (Rio and Malani 2020). Due to the novelty of Covid-19 disease, there is an urgent need for data qualitative about the social and environmental factors which modulate the transmission of the disease, the adoption of protection measures, and may increase health differentials.

In order to fill this knowledge gap, this medical anthropology project explores the configurations of living conditions – the “everyday environment of people, where they live, play and work, which are the product of social and economic circumstances and the physical environment – all of which can impact upon health – and are largely outside of the immediate control of the individual” (WHO 1998) in three different populations of the Canton de Vaud a) index cases; b) “essential services” professionals; c) asylum seekers,. This particularly densely populated Canton, bordering France, was one of the most affected by Covid-19 pandemic, challenging political and health authorities in regard to preparedness, management and prevention strategies. This medical anthropological study is developed as an integral part of an epidemiological project – SérocoViD – part of the Swiss School of Public Health program – Corona Immunitas – for determining Covid-19 immunity at cantonal and national levels. It aims to complement the epidemiological quantitative methods used in SérocoViD, by shedding light on how living conditions impact viral exposure, the adoption of protective practices and the emergence of additional vulnerabilities which might increase health inequities related to gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It will undertake an ethnographic exploration of living conditions in these three populations differentially exposed to Covid-19 pandemic times with a focus on reconfigurations of professional activities, couple/family/social relations, and housing, during the pandemic. Building on solid interdisciplinary collaboration, this project will contribute to the development of public health strategies empirically grounded in people’s living conditions and integrating the interplay of environmental, social, and biological in the production of health differentials.