

Student Abstract

Author: Sara M. Bergstresser, PhD

Program of Study: MPH

University: Harvard University

Title: Legal and Political Ambiguities of Involuntary Treatment for (Mental) Illness: The Italian Case of Marco Pannella

Abstract: This research examines through case study the legal and social complexities of involuntary treatment for mental and/or physical illness within an international and comparative framework. This research is a qualitative case study based upon anthropological and historical methodologies. The case is that of Marco Pannella, a prominent Italian political figure, whose 2002 politically-motivated hunger and thirst strike sparked debate about Italy's laws regarding involuntary treatment for health; in particular, discussion centered upon whether the ailment should necessarily be mental in nature, particularly when loss of life is at issue. This case is of particular historical interest because Pannella himself was one of the major political figures who used his influence to promote psychiatric reform and the passing of laws restricting the legal scope of involuntary treatment in 1978. Conclusions are drawn about the legal and social ambiguity of involuntary treatment and the political and contextual underpinnings that influence processes of law and public health.