

Lakshmi Kutty

Scientific responses to tuberculosis: Poverty as mirage

Abstract -- This paper explores how the globalization of risk in tuberculosis (TB) policy discourse has been animated through two artefacts of scientific expertise: one, the conceptual tool of default (as in defaulter/ non-compliant behaviour), and two, the methodological tools related to Annual Risk of Infection (ARI). Deploying a cost-effectiveness discourse has enabled a particular rational, techno-scientific and managerial framing of knowledge, wherein a socio-political discussion of TB disease and treatment is elided and a specific kind of professional expertise is legitimised as universal scientific truth. The paper lays out the processes by which questions of poverty in TB have been re-framed and re-cast by specific kinds of scientific rationality and organizational backing, thus eliding the multiple forms of structural violence which impinge on the lives of poor persons suffering from TB. I aim to argue that poverty appearing to hold sway over the policy imagination as a factor impacting TB is ultimately merely a mirage; the development of scientific tools and policy in TB has consistently ruptured any possibility of engaging with the structural, political and discursive elements of poverty and TB.