



GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH WEBINAR SERIES:  
**CRITICAL, CULTURAL, AND  
PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES**

## Who Counts as a Person? Disability, Mental Health and the Violence of Concealment

### ABSTRACT:

In 2016, in what has come to be known as the Esidimeni tragedy, a number of people with intellectual disability and mental disorders were moved from registered care homes in Gauteng province, South Africa, to unregistered facilities. Within the following months, at least 141 of these vulnerable people died. Most were black South Africans. This happened not under apartheid but over twenty years into South Africa's democracy. How could this happen in the country of Mandela?

The Esidimeni tragedy and its aftermath has rightly led to a great deal of anguish and introspection in South Africa. In this webinar, I discuss the cultural and social context of Esidimeni with an eye to raising more general questions about the social and political issues which should concern all involved with mental health and disability issues. Under apartheid, the particular case of South Africa highlighted the ways in which even apparently progressive and well-meaning policies and practices may enable discrimination and abuse. Ironically enough, the current postcolonial South African context may again throw light on this question. Key to these concerns are more pervasive questions about how and under what conditions we attribute personhood to marginal and disenfranchised groups.

### MODERATOR

#### **Mónica Ruiz-Casares**

PhD, MSc, MA, LLB  
Associate Professor  
Division of Social and Cultural Psychiatry,  
McGill University



### SPEAKER

**Dr. Leslie Swartz** is a clinical psychologist and a distinguished professor of psychology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He is an associate editor of *Transcultural Psychiatry*, and has a long-standing interest in cultural issues in mental health, especially in relation to issues of care in low-income contexts. He also has an interest in disability studies, and works on issues of social inclusion and participation for people with disabilities in southern Africa.

**March 29th, 2019, 9:00–10:00 (ET)**

Attendance: <https://event.voiceboxer.com/event/jhuu7c/login>  
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