

Centre for Reproduction Research Seminar Series

Tuesday 14 May 2019, 12-1.30, Edith Murphy House 1.28

Dr. Sezin Topçu,
French National Research Center (CNRS) and
Paris School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (Ehess)

‘Caesarean Nation? Techno-birth, Risk and Obstetric Practice in Turkey’

As places are limited, please email CRR@dmu.ac.uk if you wish to attend to secure your place.

Abstract

Caesarean sections (C-sections) have become a substitute for vaginal births in a number of developing and emerging economies. Often in these contexts, the promotion of caesarean delivery as a safe or even zero-risk and zero-pain alternative to vaginal birth continues to serve as a powerful discursive tool in governing childbirth, despite growing international evidence on the iatrogenic effects of C-sections. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in one private and one public hospital in western Turkey, I explore the various ways in which the safety of caesarean delivery and the risks of vaginal birth are dynamically constructed, managed and re-evaluated by obstetricians on a day-to-day basis. I also look at the diverse and sometimes unexpected fallouts from the recent regulatory measures targeting ‘caesarean abuse’ in the public and private sectors, in contexts of ‘caesarean epidemics’. Drawing on social studies of technology and gender and on sociocultural conceptualisations of risk, I argue that obstetricians’ risk discourses and practices are orientated by a large set of intertwined factors at the intersection of economics, politics and medical knowledge and technologies. I contend that contexts of controversy offer fruitful ground for the analysis of such factors as well as of medical and institutional construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of risk. I also highlight a major paradox. In the settings examined, the safety of caesarean delivery was often acknowledged in reference to the riskiness of vaginal birth, despite the fact that vaginal birth was made just as technicised and safe as caesarean birth. Finally, I argue that the best way to understand this paradox is to approach risk as a discursive tool that obstetricians draw on in their daily practices and when exerting their medical power.

Speaker biography

Dr. Sezin Topçu is a sociologist of science, technology and medicine, specializing on issues of knowledge-ignorance production within environmental and reproductive health fields. She is a Senior Researcher at the French National Research Center (CNRS) and a Senior Lecturer at the Paris School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (Ehess). She is also a full member of the Center for the Study of the Social Movements (CEMS-Ehess). Her current research focuses on processes of medicalization of the maternal body, and the related public debates and controversies, in two national contexts: France and Turkey. She has recently coordinated, in collaboration with Ilana Löwy and Kirstie Coxon, a special issue for *Health, Risk & Society*, entitled *Technological Childbirth in a Transnational Perspective: Creating and Managing Childbirth Risk in Contrasting Cultural, Social and Economic Settings* (forthcoming, summer 2019).