



The Teaching of Global Health in Non-Health Faculties: *The Italian Experience*

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Background

Why is studying Global Health important?

As widely documented, health (or ill-health) is widely influenced by determinants, policies and interventions outside the traditional domain of the health sector and its actors.

The relevance of public policies in other sectors conceived with health impacts in mind is well recognized and has also been recently introduced into the global political agenda, including that of the G8. Thus, it is of great importance to ensure adequate awareness and training in global health for professionals who have or will have responsibilities in educational, social, economic, and environmental policy-making and management, or be involved in international relations, just to mention a few examples.

What are the new capacities and skills required?

Health promotion in times of globalization indeed requires new languages and a new health paradigm. It requires professionals with the appropriate competence and attitude for the newly defined domain “global health”, which is characterized by, among other attributes, the interdependence of health determinants beyond national borders. This approach, supported by valuable studies, faces strong resistance within the conventional academic culture and medical research which is strongly influenced by a scientific culture oriented by a technological, biomedical approach, focused on the development of marketable products, rather than preventive measures based on correcting social determinants of ill-health.

What currently exists in the field of Global Health and Development Education?

Several courses have been activated in the domain of health sciences and in public health schools while educational opportunities in global health-related issues for individuals in non-health disciplines are still relatively limited internationally. Notwithstanding its early start, Italy is no exception.

Nevertheless, positive changes have been observed, also thanks to the work of the Italian Global Health Watch (OISG) which has been active for almost ten years and strongly engaged in the promotion of training in the field of Global Health over the past years.

A recent mapping of medical schools in Italy showed the presence of global health courses (between 6 and 20 hours per course) in only 11 universities. However no similar exercise has been conducted outside medical schools; that is, in non-health related faculties. This is the first attempt to explore this domain.

Objectives and Methodologies

The objective of this study was to explore the Italian offer of undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate courses in global health in non-health disciplines.

The availability and comprehensiveness of courses in global health in Italy was explored and analyzed. This included a mapping exercise in Italy in 2007 to identify global health teaching in the 40 Italian medical schools, in the context of the “Equal opportunities for health: action for development multi-partner” project. The most relevant and known Italian experiences introducing “Global Health” and the study of related issues in the teaching of traditional disciplines, outside Medicine and other health sciences, were identified and their curricula analyzed.

Post-course evaluations of students attending the Master of International Healthcare Management, Economics and Policy (MIHMEP) at the Bocconi School of Management were directly examined as well as their subsequent career choices.

Institutional attitudes toward global health teaching in other faculties not traditionally concerned with health were also explored and areas for improvement were identified through experience sharing in the Italian Network for Global Health Teaching (Rete Italiana per l'Insegnamento della Salute Globale – RIISG) and among members of the Italian Global Health Watch (Osservatorio Italiano per la Salute Globale).

Main Findings

The “Equal Opportunities for Health” Study

36 Global Health related courses were found distributed over 11 universities. The study included any course considered to be directly related to global health according to predefined inclusion criteria conferring at least one ECTS. All of these institutions were situated in central-northern Italy with none in the south of the country. Course contents were highly non-homogeneous with prevailing focus on public health aspects. Post-graduate courses were apparently lacking.

“Short Courses” Dominate the Field

Following the Anglo-Saxon experience in the context of post-experience teaching, short courses in Global health are increasingly being offered in Italy by the National Health Service under the Continuous Education in Medicine (Educazione Continua in Medicina - ECM) program for health professionals.

Specific Offerings in Italy

Non-health Disciplines with Courses

When extending the analysis of Global Health teaching to non-health faculties, the variety of contents proposed under that denomination is confirmed. Similarly, there are courses whose contents reflect “global health but do not have ‘global health’ in the title” of these courses. Considering the extensiveness and complexity of the issues, as well as the need for an interdisciplinary approach, a nearly comprehensive course on “Global Health” would require at least a full-year duration.

Global Health and Political Science

Global health issues have been included during the academic year 2007-08 in the Master of Science in Human Rights and Peace Institutions and Policies at the Political Sciences Faculty in Padova. Here the global health focus was also linked to issues related to ethics and law in medicine, while also touching upon commercialisation and health and issues such as disease mongering.

The following year the course was suspended. However, some of the course materials were included in the regular Bioethics course of the same faculty. Nevertheless, the interest for global health remains high among political sciences students, some of whom have requested to develop their final thesis in this field.

Global Health and Social Science

A “Global Health” course has been taught since 2001 in a specialization course in Management of Social Services (PROGEST) at the Faculty of Sociology at Milan Bicocca University, which was later reclassified as Master of Science in the context of the Bologna process.¹ The 24-hour (3 ECTS credits) course was titled “Global Policies for Health” and became the first “Global Health” course ever taught in an Italian university as part of the core study program. The course was also made accessible to students from all faculties, with the faculty of Psychology being the first to propose it to its students. In the following years, a growing number of medical faculties started to offer short, elective courses in global health. However, it is only recently that a few other faculties, all in northern Italy, initiated similar courses mostly within Master of Science programs.

Graduate Level Courses

Global health also received attention in the **Master in Analysis and Management of Development Projects** offered for 7 years by the Department of Economical, Managerial and Statistical Sciences of the University of Milan in collaboration with the Mario Negri Institute. It is interesting to note that, in this case, notwithstanding the interest and significant participation, the University decided not to invest further in the course, after it was interrupted.

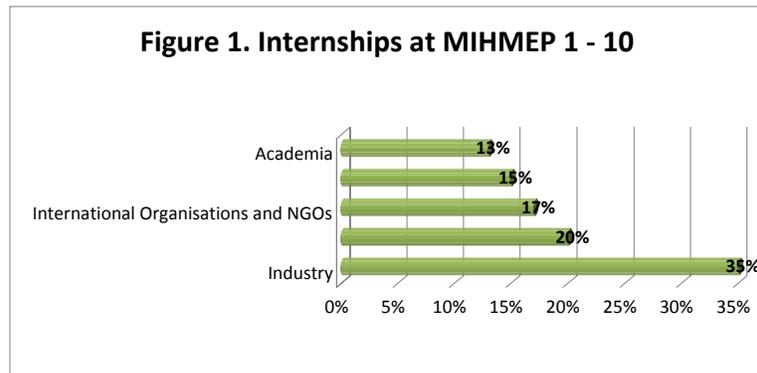
Two years ago, Trieste University also started a **Master of Science course in Development Cooperation**, including a 30-hour course on Health Policies and Systems. The course is open to students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

¹ The Bologna process aims at creating the European Higher Education Area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe.

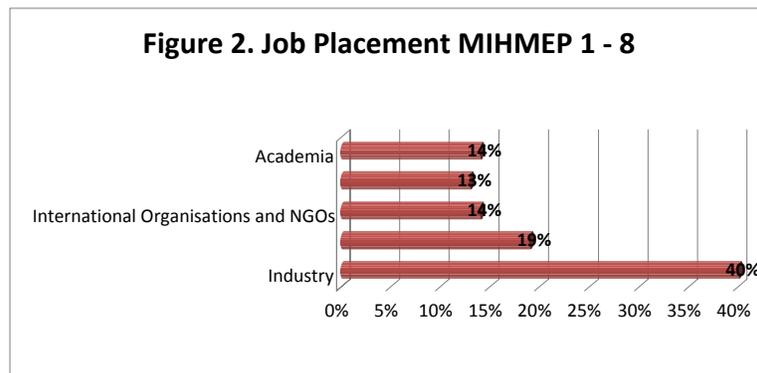
MIHMEP

The **Master in International Healthcare Management Economics and Policy (MIHMEP)** at Bocconi University School of Management in Milan (SDA Bocconi - http://www.sdabocconi.it/en/mba_and_master/mihmep) offers two Global Health-related courses: Global Strategies for Health and Policy and Management in Developing Countries. Starting this year, these courses will be integrated into a certified specialization called Global Health and Development, totaling 120 hours. The specialization, which also includes other courses specifically looking at the management of Global Health challenges, international consultancy and project management, will also deepen the analysis of Health Systems and evidence-based policy-making in low-resource countries. The course is open to graduate students of any educational background. MIHMEP students must also spend at least three months as interns in international organizations, bilateral agencies and NGOs where students work in the context of health systems at national or local levels, as well as in the pharmaceutical and biomedical technology industries.

From the analysis of internships provided to students in the last 10 years, it clearly emerged that students' interests and skills acquired at MIHMEP are very well received by all relevant macro-areas of the healthcare sector: Industry (35%), Healthcare Delivery Organizations (20%), International Organizations & NGOs (17%), Authorities (15%), and Academia (13%) (Fig. 1).



As per placement data, the numbers are presented in Figure 2. From these data, it is important to note that internships do predict students' placement thus confirming how key the Internship Process is for MIHMEP's success.



Starting from the academic year 2010-11, Bocconi University will also introduce a 48-hour (6 ECTS credits) elective introductory course in Global Health and Development for BA students in their final year. The course is the very first introduction of Global Health to undergraduate students outside health sciences.

Conclusions

- Global health courses arouse interest in diverse subject areas in Italian universities; significant student enthusiasm is noted.
- There is a lack of understanding of the importance of global health training for non-health professionals and their potential role in health-related fields in the global arena.
- Only a few academic institutions are offering global health courses outside medical schools, and these are still limited to social sciences, economics and management studies.
- There are clear necessities and benefits for augmenting global health education in non-health fields.
- Institutional support, innovative educational strategies and methodologies are needed.
- There is a need for a systematic mapping of Global Health teaching in non-health faculties.
- The ongoing standardization process of Global Health curricula conducted by the Italian Network for Global Health Teaching (Rete Italiana per l'Insegnamento della Salute Globale – RIISG) should involve also non-health faculties.
- Educational tracks should include both brief courses within larger disciplines that impact global health as well as courses which emphasize multi- and interdisciplinary approaches and evidence-based research, at all levels of higher education (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate).

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