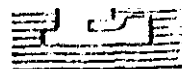


UNITED NATIONS



ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



General
E/CN.12/URB/15
UNESCO/SS/URB/LA/15
5 October 1958

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

SEMINAR ON URBANIZATION PROBLEMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Jointly sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs and the secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, in co-operation with the International Labour Office and the Organization of American States.

Santiago, Chile, 6-18 July 1959

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF URBANIZATION
BASED ON CASE STUDIES IN PERU

by H. Rotondo



For the study of the probable influence of urban and rural environments on certain aspects of mental health, we felt that it would be useful to carry out a comparative analysis of various communities, each with different characteristics, within the folk-urban continuum. If we consider the ideal and extreme types of an urban and a rural environment, with a variety of intermediate forms, as independent variables, we have to accept as dependent the significant findings with regard to personality problems in emotional disorders. For this purpose, communities must be chosen in given areas providing examples of the various influences of the social and cultural environment.

Studies on the incidence of mental or emotional disorders based on statistics of admission to psychiatric clinics have shown that the incidence is highest, as regards almost every form of psychotic or neurotic disorder, in urban communities (Carney Landis and Page; Arnold Rose and Holger R. Stub; B. Malzberg). Nevertheless, studies of mental illness in certain areas have revealed that more than half the persons suffering from psychosis were not in hospitals (surveys of Williamson County, the Allgau in Bavaria, etc.). For this reason studies of the census type among the population presumed to be in normal health are of the greatest value in obtaining exhaustive information and then relating it to specific social conditions as a whole.

Incidentally, the inhabitants revealing obvious mental abnormalities or disorders constitute a small minority of the population, so that in order to ascertain the extent to which social and cultural factors influence the functioning and organization of the personality in city and country dwellers, we have to study the frequency and relationship of minor deviations, of slight emotional disorders and even of attitudes which may be at the root of difficulties in personal relationship.

To start with, it is important to ascertain the frequency of certain psychic symptoms, emotional reactions, and personal relationship attitudes which may arise from the phenomenon of urbanization, the growth of population in the towns and the special ways of individual and social living in the resulting environment.

/The population

The population of the city of Lima is passing through a phase of rapid growth, owing to mass migration from the provinces, chiefly from the rural areas or small towns in the various regions of Peru (coastal area, highlands and forest zone). In 1940, as Kingsley Davis pointed out, 35.7 per cent of the population came from outside the department of Lima, and this percentage would probably be far higher now. Many come to the city with great hopes, which are generally frustrated. Life in the city is not easy for them; they do not earn enough to be able to afford hygienic living quarters, and many are not trained for skilled work.

Our study begins with the population of "M", one of the worst quarters of the city from the point of view of hygienic conditions, population density and delinquency. It is strictly a slum area rather than a "marginal quarter" as described and defined by José Matos Mar ("a social agglomeration formed by a population which takes over waste land, usually owned by the State or the public welfare authorities, the municipalities or private owners. When such an invasion takes place, the squatters divide the land into plots of different sizes, distribute the plots on which they build their dwellings, using any kind of building materials, and their main concern is to be considered as owners of the land. This concern is the fundamental motive underlying the actions of all these people and is at the same time a tremendous cause of insecurity affecting the social integration of these people. In compensation, the family plays a fundamental part in ensuring social security, as do also the squatters' associations").

"M" is a quarter covering an area of 145 000 sq. m., with a population of 4 914 persons (Census taken by the Institute of Ethnology, November 1956). This population consists of 1 016 domestic units (groups of persons living under the same roof): (1) 49 married couples; (2) 444 nuclear families; (3) 166 incomplete families, i.e. families split up by death, abandonment or desertion by the husband or wife; (4) 238 extended families (nuclear groups joined by other relatives); (5) 76 heterogeneous groups and (6) 43 individuals or persons living /alone. Ninety-nine

alone. Ninety-nine per cent of the people of "M" rent their dwellings. Most of them are unskilled workers, while a smaller number are peddlers, domestic workers and porters. Broken down by place of origin, the majority are from the provinces; most of them are from the highlands or the coastal region, while natives of Lima are in a minority.

There are wide psychological variations among these groups of different origins; and racial prejudices, with the resulting negative mental attitudes, are clearly evident. Neighbours scarcely know one another, preferring to associate with relatives and with country people, chiefly from outside the quarter. The students and instructors of the Peruvian School of Social Service have never succeeded in interesting the adult male population in community organization, and the women attend meetings of various kinds organized by religious bodies merely in order to obtain assistance. The inhabitants of "M" usually have a poor opinion of one another and describe one another as "no good", "a bad lot", etc. They all want to leave the quarter; they feel "humiliated and ashamed" at belonging to it; and they are anxious to get away from the area but are unable to do so owing to the difficulty in finding accommodation within their scanty means.

The other populated area studied for purposes of comparison is the small rural village of "P", situated on the coast quite close to Lima. It has 1 124 inhabitants divided into 249 domestic units, mainly of the nuclear family type. A feature of the place is the high degree of stability and homogeneity, with several families inter-married. About 80 per cent are natives of the district and still live there, although many of them work in Lima or the surrounding district. The adult population over eighteen years of age numbers 523, 41.26 per cent being engaged in agricultural work, many combining the cultivation of a tiny plot of ground with work as hired farm hands. In addition to these agricultural workers, a large proportion - 19.80 per cent - consists of industrial workers employed in factories in the neighbourhood, and there is a fair proportion of small traders - 14.43 per cent. Generally speaking, their incomes are inadequate; many women work along with the men and even run small businesses. There is a certain

/tension between

tension between the large landowners and the smallholders, the latter being the remains of a very old indigenous community now broken up, but still subsisting under cover for purposes of self-defence. There are serious problems of water supply for irrigation and many fear absorption by the haciendas. The village is a very short distance away from a main national highway, and its inhabitants go into Lima very frequently, either to their work or on holidays. They all know one another and many are distantly or closely related. There is a considerable degree of sociability, everyone greets everyone else, and groups form to gossip in the street. Generally speaking, their dwellings are well built, spacious and much better than those in "M".

From "M", we selected a sampling proportionate to the number of domestic units. Thus our investigation covered 8 married couples, 67 nuclear families, 25 incomplete families, 36 extended families, 12 heterogeneous groups and 7 persons living alone - a total of 239 individuals: 124 men and 115 women. The sampling included about 18 per cent of natives of Lima, 37 per cent from various departments on the coast or the coastal areas of those departments which also have provinces in the Andes, 43 per cent from the highlands or the Andean area and only 0.8 per cent from the Amazon or forest region, as it is also called. The great majority in this sampling were in the age group 20 to 50 years, which is quite representative of the youngish population of "M".

From the population of "P" we selected at random a sampling of 25 per cent of the 523 adults aged over 18, i.e. 124 persons: 55 men and 69 women, 95 per cent of them natives of the district.

For the samplings in both areas, apart from other methods of study, we filled out a health questionnaire (Cornell Medical Index) which furnishes information concerning not only physical health but also the emotional life. It covers, in fact, in the form of questions, the most important items for a full case history.

We give below the findings in the form of percentages of the sample population, in certain cases with reference to sex or to specific domestic units.

/To begin

To begin with, let us compare certain significant results showing inadequacy in personal relationship and under stress: social anxiety, thought and action quickly disorganized by undue pressure of work, etc. In the "M" sampling, 26.6 per cent of the replies indicated much perspiring or trembling during an examination or questioning, while only 11 per cent of the "P" sample population gave that indication. In reply to question 146 of the questionnaire (Do you become nervous and tremble when your boss approaches?), 29.9 per cent of the "M" sampling gave the answer "yes", as against 15.4 per cent of the "P" sampling. Question 147 (Does your work go to pieces when your boss is watching?) was answered affirmatively by 23.4 per cent of the "M" sampling and by 13.7 per cent of the "P" sampling. Differences were greater in connexion with question 148 (Do you get confused when you have to do something quickly?). In the "M" sampling, 51.04 per cent said "yes", as against 37.7 per cent in the "P" sampling. These results show that the people of "M" more easily go to pieces in situations of stress. This is doubtless connected with a high level of tension or emotional "charge" in the sense in which the term is used by Kurt Lewin, together with an evident sense of inadequacy and inferiority complex. In the "M" sampling, 36.4 per cent replied in the affirmative to question 153 (Do you find it hard to make decisions?). Of these, 49 were women (56.3 per cent) and 38 (43.6 per cent) men. By place of origin, we find that 28 are from the coastal area and 36 from the highlands, i.e., a total of 64 immigrants to the capital, or 73.6 per cent of the total number who answered "yes" to the question, as against 23 natives of Lima, i.e. 26.4 per cent of the total. On the other hand, of the sampling from "P", only 32.2 per cent gave affirmative replies, and strangely enough only 27.5 per cent of these were men as compared with 72.5 per cent women.

This difficulty in making decisions, which occurs as frequently in the urban as in the rural population under consideration, does not appear to be the expression of a personality defect of the abulia type, but seems rather to come from the ambiguity of their field of cognition which includes actual confusion of their sense of values - they do not

see any clear way of attaining their objectives and many of those objectives either have to be abandoned or seem to be totally unattainable.

Oddly enough, 54.8 per cent of the "M" cases and 54 per cent of those of "P" replied in the affirmative to the question "Would you like to have someone always with you to advise you?" This is a characteristic dependency reaction, or a search for some significant figure to guide, counsel, or protect. This may be a regressive reaction in the face of the many frustrations, principally economic and social, to which the people are subjected, and it undoubtedly prevents them from helping themselves more effectively within the range of their own capabilities. This would explain the common tendency to sit back and wait for assistance of a paternalistic kind, a tendency which destroys initiative and thus frequently wrecks or hampers plans for the reorganization of the community.

Depressive symptoms are very frequent among the people of "M". Of the population of "M" included in the study, 17.1 per cent felt lonely and unhappy on holidays (Question 157). Of the cases from "P", about 12 per cent gave the same answer. Greater differences between the two groups were revealed in connexion with question 160 (Do you always feel discouraged and unhappy?). To this question, 31.3 per cent of the "M" sampling replied "yes", and only 20.9 per cent of those from "P". Analysis of the subjects from "M" reveals that 15 were natives of Lima, 23 from the coastal zone and 27 from the highlands, or 20 per cent, 30 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. Classified according to sex, 34.6 per cent were men and 65.3 per cent women; but curiously enough, of the 37 highland people who answered in the affirmative, 16 were men and 21 women, i.e. 43.2 per cent and 56.7 per cent, whereas there were only 3 men and 12 women amongst the natives of Lima and 7 men and 16 women amongst the coast dwellers. These depressive symptoms are slightly more frequent among the highland folk, with men and women in almost equal numbers; in the "P" sampling, on the other hand, depressive symptoms were found chiefly among females (69.2 per cent).

/Of the

Of the population sampling of "M" 24.2 per cent, and of "P" 17.7 per cent, stated that they had "nothing to hope for in life". We must point out in regard to the domestic units in "M" that 50 per cent of the incomplete families and 43.7 per cent of the heterogeneous groups gave pessimistic answers.

Seventeen point six per cent of the "M" sampling and 12 per cent of that of "P" "sometimes wished they were dead and had done with all their problems"; but against that, the suicide rate or attempted suicide rate in both areas is very low. In "M", in the course of five years (1952-1956) only four people tried to commit suicide and none of them succeeded; incidentally, all of them were natives of Lima. As Harry Stack Sullivan points out, the idea of committing suicide is a very common human experience, but very few people actually make the attempt. Unfortunately we have no comparative data on such fantasies in the various groups of the general population. The incidence we found seems to us high, but in contrast there were few attempted suicides and an extremely high incidence of pessimistic attitudes and depressive symptoms. One plausible explanation of this curious phenomenon is that there is a streak of passivity in the population groups studied, or else there are factors providing some support in the midst of failure and helplessness. At any rate, we can state that the symptoms observed are not of a manic-depressive type but of the reactive, circumstantial type. The symptoms which occur quite frequently in the urban population of "M" cannot be compared with those found in such enormous numbers by Joseph W. Eaton and Robert J. Weil in the Hutterite population of North America and Canada, where they are of an endogenous, manic-depressive type. Our findings seem to us to represent a normal biological response to frustrating situations which tend to go on indefinitely with no apparent way out.

Anxiety symptoms are fairly frequent in both population groups. Replying to question 163 (Are you constantly worried and upset?), 44.2 per cent of the subjects in the sampling from "M" and 33.8 per cent of those from "P" answered "yes". About 21 per cent of those from "M" replied that they were always excited and nervous (Question 188) while

19.3 per cent of those from "P" gave the same reply. A breakdown by sex of those replies from "M" who replied thus shows that 35.8 per cent were men and 64.1 per cent women. Only 1 male native of Lima replied in the affirmative, along with 7 men from the coastal area and 11 from the highlands, as against 12 women from Lima, 8 from the coast and 14 from the highlands. The reply to question 189 (Does a sudden loud noise make you jump or tremble violently?) was "yes" in the case of 35.9 per cent of the "M" cases and 40.3 per cent of those from "P". Anxiety dreams (Question 192) were 39.3 per cent in "M" and 44.4 in "P". Groundless fears, the common form of anxiety, were found in 14.6 per cent of the subjects from "M" and in 16.1 per cent of those from "P" (Question 194). With regard to cardiac symptoms of anxiety, 30.5 per cent of the "M" cases studied felt pain in the heart or chest (Question 30) as against 25.7 per cent from "P"; while 27.1 per cent of the subjects from "M" and 26.6 per cent of those from "P" said that they "suffered frequently from palpitations of the heart" (Question 31).

As we say, there are no major differences with regard to the incidence of anxiety symptoms of various types in the two places studied, which suggests common factors of insecurity and conflict. Erik Essen-Möller found in a small Swedish village complaints of nervousness and anxiety among 18 per cent of the women and 7 per cent of the men; the low incidence here, as compared with the higher rate which we found in the small rural village of "P", is probably explained by differences in collective security. If we now compare our urban findings with those obtained in an area in the centre of New York by Thomas A.C. Rennie, Leo Srole and Marvin K. Opler, we find a distinct similarity to what they found in the lower social strata of their sampling - 25 per cent anxiety reaction with no somatic symptoms, alongside of 43 per cent of cases in the upper stratum and in general about 33 per cent with two or more acute signs of anxiety or tension.

We shall go on to analyse certain personal relationship attitudes which without any doubt produce serious problems instead of conducing
/to a adaptation.

to adaptation. Thus about 32.4 per cent of the "M" sampling and 25 per cent of that of "P" showed timidity and difficulty in entering into relationships with others. Readiness to take offence (Question 174) was present in 50 per cent of the "M" urban dwellers and in only 20.9 per cent of the rural dwellers from "P". The feeling of being misunderstood is fairly widespread in "M". - 20.9 per cent of cases - but it is still more common at "P" - 30.6 per cent, though chiefly amongst the women, 31 of whom answered in the affirmative as against only 12 men.

There is much mutual distrust amongst the people of "M", which probably means that they feel strangers to one another. No less than 50.2 per cent of the "M" cases studied stated that they always felt distrust even among their friends (Question 178). Of these 120 persons, 45 per cent were men and 55 per cent women. The percentage of distrustful subjects was greatest among the highlanders (44.1 per cent); those from the coastal area came next with 32 per cent, and the natives of Lima showed 23.3 per cent. This means that the attitude of distrust or lack of confidence is very widespread among the people of the district, and rather more common among those from the highland region. Generally speaking, our observations revealed that there was very little sociability among the people of "M", although the same was not true of "P". On the other hand, we discovered that most of the people of "M" have an extremely poor opinion of one another, even when they are not well acquainted, and anti-social acts occurring in the quarter, even though committed by a few people or at times by persons from outside the quarter, are blamed on everybody there. On the other hand, in the sampling from "P" only 34.6 per cent showed distrust or lack of confidence, answers to that effect being given by 12 men and 31 women.

The residents of "M" showed a very high degree of aggressiveness. Fifty-four per cent of the subjects from "M" lost their temper easily (Question 180) as against 43.3 per cent of those from "P". Forty-eight of the 103 former highlanders in the sampling, i.e. 46 per cent, replied in the affirmative to question 180, as compared with 69 from the coastal zone out of the total of 134 in the sampling, i.e. 51 per cent. This

/shows a

shows a high rate of aggressiveness in people from the coastal zone and natives of Lima living in "M" and slightly less in the people from the highlands.

With regard to susceptibility to fatigue, this occurs in various forms, more frequently among the inhabitants of "M". Replying to question 108, 58.4 per cent said that they "sometimes feel completely exhausted" while 40.3 per cent of the "P" sampling gave that reply. A feeling of being tired in the morning, which is connected with a neurotic depressive condition, occurred in about 25 per cent of the "M" cases and 18.5 per cent of those from "P" (Question 110). A feeling of tiring with the slightest effort, which may have some connexion with a chronic debilitating disease, with neurosis of the asthenic or depressive type, occurred in 21.2 per cent of the cases from "M" and in only 12.1 per cent of those from "P". It is interesting to note that in the investigation in a Swedish village (Essen-Möller), only 12 per cent of the women and a mere 2 to 3 per cent of the men complained of fatigue.

Of the subjects from "M", 10.8 per cent, and of those from "P", 9.6 per cent admitted that they were often ill. To question 121 (Are you wearing yourself out worrying about your health?) 28.3 per cent of the "M" sampling and 29 per cent from "P" replied in the affirmative. That means that in both the urban and the rural area studied, there is quite a high incidence of hypochondria, which is a common method of masking anxieties.

With regard to psychosomatic states, high blood pressure, diagnosed by a doctor, was reported by 21 subjects or 8.7 per cent from "M" as against 8.8 per cent in the sampling from "P".

Eight subjects from "M" (3.3 per cent) suffered from bronchial asthma as against three from "P" (2.4 per cent).

Only five subjects from "M", all males, stated that they suffered from stomach ulcers (Question 56), diagnosed by a doctor. In the sampling from "P" only two subjects said that they suffered from ulcers, and oddly enough, one was a man and the other was a woman.

Forty per cent of the urban dwellers suffering from stomach ulcers were from the highland region and 60 per cent from the coastal areas; generally speaking, relating these data to the proportion of former coast and highland folk in the sample population, we find that those from the coastal area constitute 56 per cent and the highlanders 43 per cent, which shows that both groups are highly susceptible to ulcers. This high incidence probably shows the pathogenic influence of factors or conditions accompanying life in large towns. In this connexion we may recall that Rowntree reported in 1945 that negroes living for five years in Chicago and exposed to the same tensions as white men showed the same incidence of ulcers as the latter.

We found a very high incidence of the abuse of alcohol amongst the urban dwellers of "M". Question 144 of the questionnaire (Do you generally take two or more drinks every day?) was answered affirmatively by 10.4 per cent of the cases from "M" studied as against 7.2 per cent from "P".

It is interesting to compare these results with the findings of an inquiry into the incidence of alcoholism in a predominantly working-class district in the city of Santiago, Chile (J. Marconi, Anibal Varela and others), in which 8.3 per cent of the men and 0.6 per cent of the women were classified as alcoholics. In the study made by Essen-Møller of a rural Swedish population it was found that 9.2 per cent of the adult population consumed alcohol to excess.

To sum up, we found both similarities and differences in the frequency of emotional symptoms, personal relationship attitudes and psychosomatic conditions in two Peruvian population groups, one rural and the other urban, studied by means of the census method.

The incidence of anxiety is high in both populations, with more depression and symptoms of aggressiveness in the urban dwellers. We also observed in these urban people living in a slum area, greater feelings of inadequacy, a tendency to go to pieces under stress, more distrust and lack of confidence in personal relationships, and an extremely high incidence of alcoholism.

Mention must be made of the insecurity of the inhabitants of the small rural community, the constant concern to protect the little property they possess, the limited opportunities for the younger people, and in contrast, the high degree of stability, the marked homogeneity of the group, the ample level of sociability, and the strong spirit of solidarity for purposes of self-protection.

In the urban area studied we find in general much tension, constant friction between the local people, serious racial prejudice, a widespread feeling of failure, combined with a tendency to take refuge in family life and dependency reactions.

We must point out, however, that "P" is not an isolated village, 100 per cent homogeneous and free from the influences of the city. It is not at the extreme rural limit of the folk-urban continuum. The high incidence of anxiety may be an indication of insecurity in relation to the cultural and social changes now taking place.

With regard to the inhabitants of "M", our findings reveal serious frustration, incapacity to overcome difficulties, loss of hope, and seclusion as an obvious defence mechanism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Joseph Eaton and Robert J. Weil: Culture and Mental Disorders (Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1953); Erik Essen-Möller: Individual Traits and Morbidity in a Swedish Rural Population (Acta Psychiatrica et Neurologica Scandinavica, Supplementum 100, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1956); Carney Landis and James D. Page: Modern Society and Mental Disease (Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1938); B. Malzberg: The Prevalence of Mental Disease among the Urban and Rural Population of New York State (Psychiat. Quart. 9:538-69, 1935); Juan Marconi, Anibal Varela and others: "Encuesta sobre prevalencia del alcoholismo en la población de una zona de Santiago" (University of Chile, Revista de Psiquiatría, vols. 18-19-20: 11-16, 1953-1954-1955); Horace Miner: The Folk-Urban Continuum (Am. Sociol. Rev. 17-529-39, October 1952); Arnold Rose and Holger R. Stub: Summary of Studies on the Incidence of Mental Disorders (Mental Health and Mental Disorder, Ed. Arnold Rose; W.W. Norton, New York, 1955); William Roth and Frank H. Luton: The Mental Health Program in Tennessee. I. Description of the original study program. II. Statistical report of a psychiatric survey in a rural county (Am. J. of Psychiat. 99:662-675, 1943); Erik Strömngren: Statistical and Genetical Population Studies within Psychiatry. Methods and principal results (Congrès Inter. de Psychiatrie, VI Psych. Sociale; Herman and Cie, Paris 1950); Harry Stack Sullivan: Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry (W.W. Norton and Cie. Inc., New York, 1953); Louis Wirth: Urbanism as a Way of Life (Cities and Societies. The revised reader in Urban Sociology, Ed. Paul K. Hatt and Albert J. Reiss, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. 1957).

