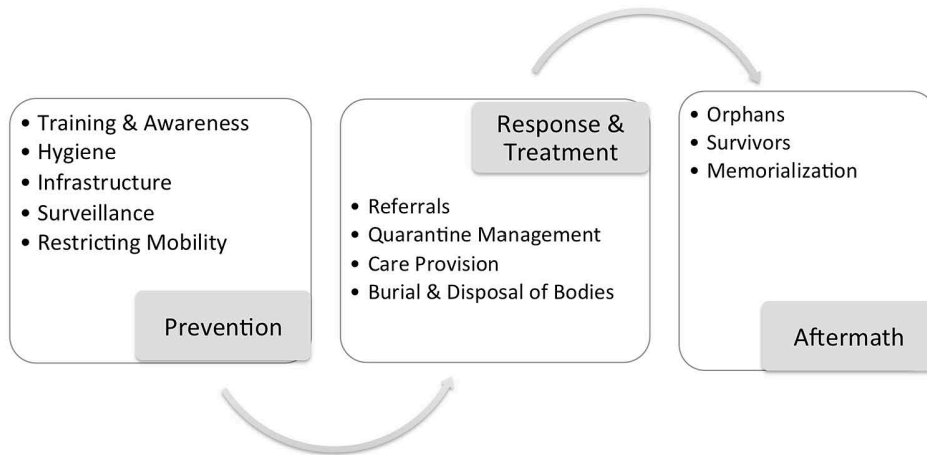


# CULTURE AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE WEST AFRICAN EBOLA EPIDEMIC

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Sharon Abramowitz has taken a lead role in building the Emergency Ebola Anthropology Network. Starting in September 2014, Abramowitz, the American Anthropological Association, and colleagues obtained support for creation of the AAA/WCAA/Wenner-Gren/GWU Emergency Initiative on Anthropology and Ebola, which culminated in the convening of 30 leading anthropologists of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria, infectious disease and epidemics, and humanitarian response at George Washington University on November 6th-7th, 2014. The first task of the initiative was to generate a series of anthropologically informed recommendations for the Emergency Ebola Response in West Africa, which is now publicly available through the American Anthropological Association Website.

Through the Emergency Ebola Anthropology Network, Abramowitz has sought to bring together interdisciplinary and international social science experts to inform the Ebola response. Presently, the network includes 150-200 experts in 11 countries, including U.S., U.K., Canada, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. Most participants have 10-30 years of experience in the region

and with humanitarian organizations. Communications are further circulated across several other national networks of social science experts working on Ebola, including the Réseau Ouest-Africain SHS Ebola (a Francophone social science listserv), a collective of anthropologists operating in Liberia, and several practitioner networks (ex. UNDP's ALNAP network, the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA), and the National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA). The Network has built linkages with the Centers for Disease Control, the United Nations Mission for Emergency Ebola Response (UNMEER), the World Bank, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the World Bank, the US government, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization, as well as partners in the government of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and neighboring countries. The network works via a publicly accessible listserv, a discussion board, and a website hosted by the UK Ebola Anthropology Platform.

In order to contribute to the Ebola response directly through research, Abramowitz has been working in partnership with colleagues at UF, Yale, and the World Health Organization in Liberia to analyze data collected during the height of the Ebola crisis in Liberia between

August-October 2014. This research has explored several critical issues informing the Ebola response, including the pace in which local populations assimilated new information about Ebola, local attitudes towards mass graves and cremation, community-based responses to Ebola in urban neighborhoods, and patterns of healthcare-seeking and clusters of co-morbidity in the Ebola crisis.

Abramowitz published her monograph *Searching for Normal in the Wake of the Liberian War* in 2014 and has an edited volume forthcoming publication in 2015 (with Catherine Panter-Brick, Yale University) entitled *Medical Humanitarianism: Ethnographies of Practice*, both with University of Pennsylvania Press. In addition, Abramowitz has continued her pre-existing research agenda focused on medical humanitarianism and gender-based violence. She has also continued her research into the history of gender-based violence in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Rwanda in order to empirically examine and theorize how patterns of gender violence and gendered protections are shaped by historical and contemporary conditions in diverse contexts.



Sharon Abramowitz is assistant professor of anthropology & African studies.