

## **International Comparison and Collaboration in Medical Sociology: Research Initiatives, Challenges, and Future Prospects**

Understanding local healthcare resources and practices is essential for improving people's health and well-being. International comparative perspectives provide a reference point for identifying inter-/intra-community variations in healthcare environments and practices, with international collaboration being a joint responsibility. This symposium, bringing together researchers from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Japan—three countries that have very different welfare systems and theoretical traditions in medical sociology—aimed to present and discuss their work and recent relevant trends, based on international comparative studies and collaborative research initiatives. The event was supported by funding from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness.

The symposium took place in the Committee Rooms 1 & 2 in the Glamorgan Building at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences on August the 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019, attracting approximately 30 participants from a variety of disciplines including sociology, social policy, public health, medicine, life science, science and technology studies, and legal studies.

Contributions include the following: delegates from the JSPS London, Professor Nobuo Ueno (Director) and Ms Asami Matsumura (International Programme Associate), as well as the lead organiser, made their opening remarks; Dr Martyn Pickersgill (University of Edinburgh) set out contexts for the symposium, in his talk 'Inter/Nationalising medical sociology: reflections from the UK', delineating relations in UK–non-UK literatures and institutions and barriers and challenges to international medical sociology; and three sessions were held:

- **Session 1: Inter/intra-national variations in health settings**
  - Japanese welfare state: from total-war system to globalization (Professor Tatsuya Mima, Ritsumeikan University)
  - Understanding the practice and developing the concept of healthcare bricolage (Professor Jenny Phillimore, University of Birmingham)
  - Discrimination in healthcare: evidence from European countries (Professor Sin Yi Cheung, Cardiff University, co-organiser)
- **Session 2: Cross-national studies by researchers in Japan**
  - USA–Japan: a comparison of the effects of social inequality on health (Mr Makoto Hiramatsu, Kwansei University)
  - The influence of knowledge on the social acceptance of people with schizophrenia: characteristics of a society with a history of psychiatric institutionalization (Professor Mari Higuchi, Hokkaido University)
  - Fieldwork in self-help/support groups in UK and Japanese contexts: towards understanding depression experiences from the grassroots (Dr Hiroto Shimizu, Cardiff University, UK; Ryukoku University, lead organiser)
- **Session 3: International knowledge/data hubs**
  - Reasons for using secondary data analysis in your research (Professor Rie Suzuki, University of Michigan)
  - Global Health and Education: a new UNESCO Chair and its prospects (Professor Hiroshi Yamanaka, Osaka University, co-organiser)

In the first session, the speakers, taking up historical and contemporary variations of welfare state, illustrated theoretically and empirically the ways in which state policies as well as the seeking of healthcare resources are achieved or not achieved in accordance with their interests and needs, shedding light on the agency of social actors and unequal distribution of healthcare resources by social categories that are rather persistent across time and nations. In the second session, three Japan-based speakers presented their work, taking advantage of literature and/or data in the United States, Vietnam, and the United Kingdom, respectively, to demonstrate the analytic edge of cross-national studies in identifying the characteristics of a nation that might not otherwise be revealed. In the last session, the speakers addressed advantages and challenges of cross-national initiatives in knowledge production and sharing, promoting dialogues on different cultural or policy contexts as both mutual reference points and potential barriers.

International comparison and collaboration in social sciences is a historical but modern question. Historical, because they must have existed since the birth of the disciplines. Modern, because globalisation and new technologies allow us access to resources beyond our own institution, region, state, or nation, etc. The theme might involve practically an infinite range of issues. Technical aspects aside, however, most of such issues come down to a rather simple question of why and how we do international comparison and collaboration. The symposium provided some possible ways to address such questions.

The symposium has formed a strategic basis for knowledge production, knowledge transfer, and capacity building at the international level, including UK–Japan collaboration, for research, education, and intervention, universal or local. The knowledge exchanged and network formed will promote international medical sociology, as well as the career development of students and academics in this field. The lead organiser is aiming to take part in further developing the network, through follow-on undertakings including organising meetings, assembling international and interdisciplinary participants from both the UK and Japan, and to launch an international collaborative research project.

- Dr Hiroto Shimizu, Cardiff University (Visiting Fellow); Ryukoku University (JSPS Fellow)



Symposium Participants

