

Psychiatric Epidemiology: It is Time to Form an Academic Society in Taiwan

Epidemiology is generally defined as quantitative study of the patterns and distribution, occurrence (incidence and prevalence), determination and prevention of illness. Classic epidemiologic research designs and methods developed to study epidemics and chronic diseases are increasingly being used in the investigation of psychiatric illnesses and their interaction between men and their environment. In recent years, psychiatric epidemiology has also been applied to the assessment of the benefits and risks of new psychopharmacological products [1] as well as employing the new technology in molecular and genetic study in the investigation of various distinctive psychiatric illnesses (genetic epidemiology). Despite the progress, the main value of psychiatric epidemiology remains, in ensuring the effective deployment of services available for treatment and prevention of psychiatric illness as well as the promotion of mental health. To date, however, there is no establishment of an academic organization of this discipline in Taiwan, and on the eve of the world congress of International Federation of Psychiatric Association to be held in Taiwan in 2011, it is the right time to consider forming such a society.

Development of Psychiatric Epidemiology in Taiwan

Psychiatric epidemiology was one of the earliest established discipline in the history of psy-

chiatry and medicine in Taiwan, with the pioneering Formosan study that was carried out by Professor Tsung-yi Lin in 1946 to 1948 on the survey of psychiatric illness among three communities with over 20,000 subjects [2]. It was conducted two years earlier than the survey of Sterling County in Nova Scotia, Canada. In the 15-year follow-up study of the same communities, Rin (1970) commented that findings from these empirical studies were “a basis for making rational estimates about mental disorders in Taiwan” [3]. With this foundation, Taiwan was selected as one of the 12 centers in the world to participate in the first International Pilot Study of Schizophrenia (IPSS) collaborated by the World Health Organization in 1973.

In 1985, the Chinese Society of Neurology and Psychiatry held an international symposium of psychiatric epidemiology in Taipei. Other than reports on major findings of various psychiatric epidemiological studies in Taiwan and abroad, one of the major achievements of the meeting was the extensive discussion on problems with psychiatric epidemiological methods and designs especially on case-definition and case-identification. It also brought forward the consecutive five-year national projects for the treatment and prevention of psychiatric illness in Taiwan. It was a developmental milestone for mental health service in Taiwan with an explicit revival and planning for the need of mental health facilities and manpower

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based on these empirical epidemiological data. Most importantly, it also served as a basis that gave birth to the legislation of Mental Health Act in 1990.

Epidemiological studies of mental disorders in Taiwan in recent decades have shown great improvements in case-finding method with the introduction of new concept and methodology. Screening procedure using informants in the earlier studies were replaced by more valid means of structured interview and defined objective criteria based on the DSM or ICD systems. Studies using standardized structured or semi-structured clinical interviews like the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS), Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS), Schedules for Clinical Assessment in Neuropsychiatry (SCAN), Geriatric Mental States examination for geriatrics (GMS), Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) and others were introduced. The target population extended to specific groups like the aborigines, the elderly, adolescents, victims of disaster, and mental health problems related to suicide, alcohol and substance misuse, and other deviant behaviors. More recent epidemiological studies employing epigenetic or genome-wide association technique in the study of distinctive psychiatric illness like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Besides, sophisticated statistical methods like meta-analysis were applied for analyzing multiple similar studies with greater sample size and precision.

International Federation of Psychiatric Epidemiology (IFPE)

International Federation of Psychiatric Epidemiology (IFPE), an international organization devoted to psychiatric epidemiology and related health services research, was set up at an interna-

tional conference in Brussels in 1985, following on earlier French-speaking meetings held in Lyon (1981) and Geneva (1983). From those beginnings, the Federation has grown into a truly global organization. Further successful congresses have been held in Madrid (1987), Montreal (1990), Lisbon (1993), Santiago de Compostela (1996), Taipei (1999), Edmonton (2002), Bristol (2004), Goteberg (2007), Vienna (2009) and an Asia Pacific Regional Conference was held in Shah Alam, Malaysia (2001).

The purpose of the Federation is to promote the acquisition, dissemination and application of epidemiological knowledge in the fields of psychiatry and mental health. More specifically, its aims are: (A) to promote the spreading of knowledge acquired by epidemiological and related research in these fields, (B) to stimulate the development of scientific research methods, (C) to facilitate contacts and exchange of information between researchers of different nationalities and disciplines, (D) to encourage the dissemination and publication of research findings, and (E) to sponsor international meetings pursuing these objectives.

Since 1990, IFPE has steadily enlarged its international audience and attracted an increasing number of well-known psychiatric epidemiologists as individual members. It attaches great importance to the scientific level of its activities [4]. It puts special emphasis on promoting better understanding and fruitful co-operation between epidemiologists, clinicians, behavioral scientists, and other health professionals. In the coming years, priority will be given to holding scientific meetings in areas of the world where interest in psychiatric epidemiology is developing.

The 13th IFPE Congress: March 30 - April 2, 2011, Kaohsiung

The 13th International Congress of IFPE is to be held in Kaohsiung from March 30 to April 2, 2011. It will focus on the consequences for psychiatric epidemiology and mental health services of today's world-wide economic crisis, under the theme "Mental Health and Global Recession: Psychiatric Illness, Violence and Substance Abuse in Populations under Stress." The current economic downturn has profound implications for population health and well-being, especially in low-income and developing countries. Already dramatic changes are taking place in the world economy. The International Labor Office predicts an overall loss of some 50 million jobs. According to the World Bank, developing countries' combined growth will fall to 2.1%, or to zero if India and China are excluded. This will imply an additional 56 million people falling into extreme poverty (\$1.25 daily or less). World Bank projections also indicate that at least 200,000 more children are likely to die in infancy each year as long as the current recession persists.

Although there is little information so far about the effects on mental health, we can predict on the basis of earlier crises that there will be large-scale increases in depression and suicide: that violence in a number of forms -- in ethnic conflicts and civil unrest as well as in domestic life -- will be on the increase, and that there will be upsurges in alcoholism and use of injecting drugs. At the same time mental health services, subjected to staff reductions and cost-cutting measures, will struggle to cope. Meeting these challenges will call for a close cooperation between mental health professionals from many countries as well as planning based on real-life epidemiology and public health action.

The congress is now open for submission of abstracts. Contributions on all aspects of mental health epidemiology will be welcome. As usual, a workshop will also be conducted focusing on training of researchers, and in the coming congress, it will be one on the development of mental health service with specific examples from Asian countries. For further details and confirmed keynote presenters and topics, please visit the congress website: www.ifpe2011.com.

To Establish the Taiwanese Academy of Psychiatric Epidemiology (TAPE)

Two of the 13 world congresses of IFPE including the coming 2011 were held in Taiwan: the 1999 Taipei Congress with the theme "Genome and Envirome: their Roles and Interaction in Psychiatric Epidemiology" and the 2011 Kaohsiung Congress as mentioned above. The former was a very successful meeting organized by Professor Andrew Tai-Ann Cheng with excellent papers published as a supplement of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* [5].

Despite the progress, there is still lack of an academic body of psychiatric epidemiology in Taiwan. In view of the development, it is time now to reveal the subject of psychiatric epidemiology as a distinctive discipline which will encompass topics related to clinical psychiatry, biostatistics, sociology, psychology, genetics, demography and public health administration. On the eve of the 2011 IFPE Congress in Kaohsiung, a new academic society of psychiatric epidemiology in Taiwan could be formed, and I would like to propose the name of the society with an acronym TAPE that stands for Taiwanese Academy of Psychiatric Epidemiology.

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