



Taiwan-UK SGS Health Research Netpal Symposium

Event summary

The Taiwan-UK Sex, Gender, and Sexuality Health Research Network (TUSHRN) Netpal Symposium, held on 12 March 2022, gathered 30 participants from the research network. It was a ground-breaking event, by having academics, health professionals, rights campaigners and community members based in the UK and Taiwan brainstorm, reflect on and explore the challenges and opportunities of researching the health of sexual, gender and sexuality (SGS) minorities. It was TUSHRN's first communal meet-up that we decided to run the event less formally, giving participants space to speak freely, on their own and for the communities they represent or have worked with.

The Symposium opened with Dr Ford Hickson and Prof Nai-Ying Ko's greeting words, which remarked on the importance of innovative research methodologies, especially for measurements for SGS-related topics, considering that research methods and technologies have evolved but SGS health remains underexplored. During the icebreaking session, Netpals (paired scholars based on their shared research interests and experiences) had knowledge exchange with opportunities to meet other pairs. The conversations between groups focused on sharing knowledge and observation regarding the state of the art of SGS health research in both Taiwanese and Britain societies, which formed the basis for the following sessions.

At the session on 'Brainstorming Collaborative Research Agenda', participants discussed the appropriateness of different research methods for various health-related issues. One group considered the concept of 'health works' as the working on, for and related to health and how health works on us from the capability perspective. In this context, shelterlessness and homelessness experienced by LGBTQ people and their health needs were illustrated as an example, which requires mixed methods that include the element of participatory action research. Another group considered queering research process that goes beyond individual SGS communities, which aims to capture the complexities and messiness of this reality. Overlapping concerns were identified about 'decolonising' modern knowledge about and around sex, gender and sexuality.

Another group discussed and compared the health behaviour studies in relation to sexualised drug use and HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis in Taiwan and the UK. At the same time, differences in terminologies were also identified between the researchers from the UK and the US and between researchers who study with different populations. The other group focused on sampling and the difficulty in standardising questions to get accurate estimates of an LGBTQ+ population. Quantitative research has encountered many limitations if such a problem cannot be overcome. Some participants also considered the possibility of designing and delivering cross-cultural care, which includes but is limited to incorporating cultural competency in medical education.

At the session on 'Mapping and Linking Disciplines in SGS Health Research', the 'Health, Technology and Desire' group emphasised how researchers can destabilise the



disciplinary boundaries and how SGS researchers communicate our ideas across disciplines to a wider audience. These are the crucial questions that should be addressed to bridge perspectives from different stakeholders. The 'Quantitative Research Design and Measurement' group expressed similar concerns, reflecting on designing and incorporating SGS-related questions in census surveys. It has never been easy to ask the questions with the SGS health matrix 'appropriately for all', since, for many, identity, attraction, and behaviour are not distinctive matters. Thus, ethical researchers often ask, 'are we measuring the right things, and are we doing it right?'

Interestingly, the 'Identity, Wellbeing and Mental Health' group asked similar questions, however, in discussing health issues in relation to experiences regarding perceived/enacted discrimination and stigma, relationship and connection building, and victimisation and traumatisation. It is thus important to incorporate resilience and empowerment perspectives in research design. In this regard, the 'Community, Activism, and Policy' group considered the significance and accumulative effect of 'small actions/activism' in everyday life, considering the intersectionality between self-identity, intimate lives, and rights/rightlessness. Thus, advocacy-research collaborations and LGBTQI leadership are important for rights campaigns and health promotion activities. They also highlighted the issues concerning diversity education in the pedagogical context and the syndemic perspective in the methodological context.

Last but not least, we were pleased to have Hiker Chiu with us at the Symposium. They are a Taiwanese intersex human rights activist who founded Oii-Chinese in 2008, was elected a board member of ILGA Asia in 2018, and cofounded Intersex Asia in 2018. They have shared much observation and reflection on intersex research and activism in Taiwan, Asia-Pacific, and globally. A comprehensive understanding of intersex people's intimate, romantic, and sexual relationships is absent, not to mention the existence of intersex inclusive education. On this matter, echoing previous discussions, good research designs and a communication strategy with policymakers and the public and between all SGS minority communities are a pressing need to fight marginalisation and underrepresentation.

All the brainstorming processes in the Symposium have uncovered that many jigsaw puzzles are still needed for a complete picture of SGS health. The lack of satisfactory approaches and accurate estimates further accentuates the significance of establishing a transnational network involving researchers, community members, and activists such as TUSHRN. To conclude the Symposium, participants considered the importance of developing a life-course approach to LGBTIQ+ life for longitudinal studies and qualitative accounts drawing on ethnographic, autobiographical, and action research. Therefore, it is not unimaginable that the collaborations between TUSHRN Netpals will generate innovative methodologies and a novel research agenda in the future.



Figure 1: Group photo of Symposium participants, 12 March 2022