

Summary remarks – Abi Gewirtz – PIAD Manila

We have had a packed and very intellectually stimulating four days. After warm welcomes from ICSU, IUPsyS, and our hosts at the University of the Philippines, the workshop began with a broad public health perspective on interventions for mass trauma/disaster events by Joop de Jong. In the afternoon, Klaus Boehnke shared his methodological expertise using as an example longitudinal research on personal growth after disasters. Poster presentations began on Monday, with participants sharing their original research. Lively discussion and good ideas, input, and sharing of knowledge contributed to a productive session. Day 2 started with some context setting – Rainer Silbereisen’s presentation on core concepts in psychological research related to disasters. The goal was an overview of current constructs with a focus on two emerging areas of research: epigenetics, and the social-ecological context, that are important ideas to consider and exciting new areas of research. Abi Gewirtz followed with a presentation on prevention and intervention research with families following exposure to traumatic events. After all the presentations, participants got into small groups to discuss, generate, and debate key research concepts related to the lectures, and to present those ideas. Day 3 began with Yiqun Gan’s presentation on the measurement of meaning-making and resilience following exposure to disasters. Later that day, we heard from Doug Paton via video, about disaster risk reduction. And for the final presentation of the day, Regina Hechanova shared some of the important work being done here in the Philippines to support professionals and individuals affected by disasters. Today, the final day of the workshop, we began with Motoaki Sugiura, who demonstrated an etic approach to deriving attributes of individuals associated with the power to live in the wake of the great Japanese earthquake of 2011.

Participants demonstrated their creativity, knowledge, and commitment to research via poster presentations, and in particular via small group work following each lecture. It is clear that you all have received good training in basic psychological research, and that you are so committed to research to improve the lives of your fellow countrymen affected by disasters. You think carefully, and you have long-term perspectives. Research is a slow, deliberate enterprise, which is often at odds with what is required of us after disasters – a rapid response is almost always needed to help individuals and key institutions to recover. You have to balance a scientific approach – curiosity, scientific rigor, strong methodology and analyses – with community needs, what people will agree to, and what culture dictates. I would encourage all of you to think about three things you have learned in this workshop – three things that you can take forward and apply when you return to your community and your work. What might those be? Maybe a commitment to longitudinal, rather than simply cross-sectional research. Maybe a commitment to randomized controlled trials, even though they are hard to do! Maybe a commitment to going beyond simply measuring what participants tell you (self-report) but attempting to find objective measures, alternative measurement methods, or multiple informants to give you outcome data. And finally, maybe you will not feel a need to follow universalist assumptions, but will test etic, culturally- and contextually-based hypotheses.

I would encourage you all to go back and do good research – and please, to share that research via publications in peer-reviewed journals. It is important for the rest of the psychology world

to read your findings! As incoming editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Psychology, I would like to invite you to submit your research papers to the journal. I'd also like to encourage those of you interested in reviewing for the journal to please get in touch with me. If you haven't had the chance to either write or review for this or another scientific, scholarly journal up until now, let's talk. We are committed to finding opportunities for emerging scientists to get involved in publications and reviewing the work of fellow scientists. Psychologists have much to contribute to disaster research, as we have seen throughout this workshop. We are at the forefront of knowledge about behavior change. We also now have at our disposal many new technologies that enable us both to deliver interventions, and to measure their effectiveness. Smartphones, social media, text-based programs, online data gathering, ecological momentary assessment, stress wearables. All these are tools for psychological research, and to gather crucial information in the aftermath of disasters to boost human resilience.

Go forward, do rigorous research, and use science to improve the lives of people affected by disasters in the Asia Pacific region!