

Brief report**Staff attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities in Japan and the United States****W. Horner-Johnson,¹ C. B. Keys,² D. Henry,³ K. Yamaki,⁴ K. Watanabe,⁵ F. Oi,⁶ I. Fujimura,⁷ B. C. Graham⁸ & H. Shimada⁹**

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Abstract

Background Staff attitudes may affect choices available to persons with intellectual disabilities (ID). This study examined attitudes towards people with ID among staff working with people with ID in Japan and the United States.

Method Attitudes of staff working with people with ID in Japan and the United States were compared using the Community Living Attitudes Scale, Intellectual Disabilities Form. Responses were examined via multivariate analysis of variance.

Results In unadjusted analyses, Japanese staff exhibited a greater tendency towards Sheltering and Exclusion of people with ID and lower endorsement of Empowerment and Similarity of people with ID.

After controlling for covariates, the country effect was no longer significant for Sheltering and Exclusion. Age and education were significantly associated with attitudes in the adjusted model.

Conclusions While attitudes in Japan appeared less supportive of community inclusion of people with ID, some of the differences between countries were attributable to other staff characteristics such as age and education. Findings provide new information about how attitudes of staff in each country compare with each other.

Keywords attitudes, community inclusion, cross-cultural comparison, intellectual disability, staff

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) have often been subjected to social exclusion (McDonald & Keys 2008; Verdonshot *et al.* 2009; Perry *et al.* 2013). This phenomenon can greatly limit the choices of individuals with ID, whether in an institutional setting or the larger community. Policies

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mould the environments with which people with disabilities must contend, and policy is a reflection of attitudes and values regarding disability (Hahn 1993). It is therefore useful to understand attitudes about community inclusion of people with ID, specifically individuals' views about how similar people with ID are to those without ID, how much sheltering people with ID need, how much they should be empowered to make their own decisions, and the extent to which people with ID should be segregated from the rest of society.

People with ID may be affected especially by ID-related attitudes of the staff who support them because the attitudes and expectations of these staff influence the learning and social opportunities available to people with ID (Beckwith & Matthews 1995). Staff attitudes directly impact staff-client interactions and indirectly mediate interactions between people with ID and other members of society (Beckwith & Matthews 1995). In particular, it is reasonable to expect that staff with positive attitudes towards community inclusion of people with ID will be more likely to engage in activities that foster empowerment and inclusion of the individuals with ID whom they support (Henry *et al.* 1996a; Jones *et al.* 2008).

Staff attitudes towards people with ID may be influenced by culture. The increasing international emphasis on community living (Mansell *et al.* 2010) makes cross-cultural study of attitudes towards people with ID particularly relevant. Previous research suggests that people in Japan may be more likely to support sheltering and exclusion of people with ID than is the case in the United States (Siperstein *et al.* 2003; Tachibana & Watanabe 2004). The purpose of the present study was to examine attitudes towards community inclusion of people with ID – and variables that may influence those attitudes – among residential staff in Japan and the United States.

Method

Participants

Data in Japan were collected from staff at a state-funded residential and research institution that houses roughly 380 adults with ID. United States data consisted of staff from 45 agencies operating

community residences supported by the Illinois Division of Developmental Disabilities. Agency staff worked in homes ranging in size from 2 to 22 clients. These differing residential settings represent the common modes of service delivery in each country (Braddock *et al.* 2013; T. Shiga, Director of the Division of Research, Independent Administrative Institution, National Centre for Persons with Severe Intellectual Disabilities, personal communication, May 2013).

Measures

Demographic questionnaire

Participants were asked to indicate their sex, age category, level of education, clients' level of functioning, whether or not they supervised other staff and length of time working in the ID field.

Community Living Attitudes Scale, Intellectual Disabilities Form (Henry et al. 1996b)

The Community Living Attitudes Scale, Intellectual Disabilities Form (CLAS-ID) as translated into Japanese (Horner-Johnson *et al.* 2002) is a 39-item measure with four subscales: Empowerment, Exclusion, Sheltering, and Similarity. The Empowerment subscale assesses attitudes towards people with ID making decisions about their own lives, the Exclusion subscale measures the tendency to bar people with ID from community life, the Sheltering subscale measures the extent to which people with ID are seen as needing help and protection, and the Similarity subscale captures the perceived shared humanity of people with and without ID. The measure uses a Likert-type scale with positive and negative statements about people with ID and five response options ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly. A higher score indicated a stronger endorsement of the attitude assessed. The CLAS-ID has been established as psychometrically sound with a Japanese sample (Horner-Johnson *et al.* 2002).

Procedures

Data collection procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the

University of Illinois at Chicago. Participants completed surveys anonymously. Japanese researchers collected Japanese staff data by distributing envelopes with blank surveys to supervisors and asking them to give the envelopes to staff as well as completing the surveys themselves. Completed surveys in sealed envelopes were placed in collection boxes. The response rate was 89.4%. US staff data collection involved providing each partner residential agency with a maximum of eight survey packets. Agencies with more than eight employees were asked to distribute the surveys to one upper-level manager, one mid-level supervisor and six direct care staff. The agency response rate was 63.3%, and the individual response rate was 52.4%. Both Japanese and US staff were instructed to report attitudes towards individuals with the same level of ID as the individuals they served.

Data analysis

We used chi-squared tests to examine between-country differences in categorical variables (gender, age, education, client functioning level, serving in a supervisory versus direct care role). A *t*-test compared Japanese and US staff on length of time working in the ID field. The aggregated data set (staff from both countries) was then analysed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the effects of country, demographic and work-related variables. We first examined associations of country with attitudes when not controlling for other differences among staff. We next examined each potential covariate in a model with country to see if adding the covariate to the model altered the effect of country by more than 10%. We also tested interactions of each variable with country. We then constructed a multivariable model including variables that were significantly associated with attitudes in individual analyses, appeared to impact the relationship between country and attitudes, or interacted significantly with country. Given the multiple comparisons, a *P* value of 0.01 was used as the cut-off for determining significance. The CLAS subscales were the dependent variables in all MANOVAs.

Results

Seventy-six Japanese staff and 151 US staff completed surveys. There were significant differences between countries on all demographic and job experience variables (see Table 1).

Means and standard deviations on each CLAS subscale for Japanese and US staff are shown in Table 2. In initial (unadjusted) analyses, the multivariate effect of country was significant ($F_{4,222} = 17.50, P < 0.001$). Japanese staff exhibited a greater tendency towards Sheltering and Exclusion of people with ID, and lower endorsement of Empowerment and Similarity.

In separate models, gender, age, education, client functioning level, supervisory role and time in field were each added to a model already containing country. Except for gender, all variables reduced the effect of country by more than 10% and were therefore retained as potential confounders of the relationship between country and attitudes. A similar approach yielded no significant interaction effects with country.

With all variables in the model, the multivariate effect of country was no longer significant ($F_{4,191} = 2.49, P = 0.045$). However, there were still significant country effects on the Empowerment and Similarity subscales, with Japanese staff reporting less Similarity and Empowering attitudes (see Table 3). The overall effect of age was significant ($F_{4,191} = 5.23, P = 0.001$), and there were significant age effects on Sheltering and Similarity specifically (Table 3). Older staff were more likely to endorse Sheltering and less likely to endorse Similarity. Education also had a significant effect overall [$F(4, 191) = 3.81, P = .005$], and for Empowerment and Sheltering subscales such that more educated staff demonstrated less sheltering and more empowering attitudes (Table 3). There were no significant effects for client functioning level, staff supervisory role, or tenure in the field when controlling for other variables in the model.

Discussion

Staff attitudes in Japan imply that these staff may be more likely to treat people with ID in a protective

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of staff samples

Variable	Japanese staff (n = 76)		US staff (n = 151)		All staff (n = 227)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Sex*						
Female	45	59.2	118	78.1	163	71.8
Male	28	36.8	32	21.2	60	26.4
Missing	3	3.9	1	0.7	4	1.8
Age*						
16–20	1	1.3	5	3.3	6	2.6
21–30	4	5.3	60	39.7	64	28.2
31–40	15	19.7	50	33.1	65	28.6
41–50	43	56.6	19	12.6	62	27.3
51–60	9	11.8	9	6.0	18	7.9
Above 61	1	1.3	3	2.0	4	1.8
Missing	3	3.9	5	3.3	8	3.5
Highest level of education*						
High school or less	0	0.0	11	7.3	11	4.9
Some college	44	57.8	35	23.2	79	34.8
College graduate	0	0.0	47	31.1	47	20.7
Some grad school	28	36.8	41	27.2	69	30.4
Grad degree	0	0.0	15	9.9	15	6.6
Missing	4	5.3	2	1.3	6	2.6
Client functioning*						
High	4	5.3	89	58.9	93	41.0
Low	38	50.0	59	39.1	97	42.7
Mixed	34	44.7	3	2.0	37	16.3
Do you supervise other staff?*						
Yes	9	11.8	55	36.4	64	28.2
No	55	72.4	87	57.6	142	62.6
Missing	12	15.8	9	6.0	21	9.2
Time in field (months)*						
Range	6.0–360.0		1.0–360.0		1.0–360.0	
Mean	206.30		56.20		106.45	
Median	219.41		36.00		100.28	

* Significant difference between countries at $P \leq 0.01$.

Note: Values in italics indicate median age and education categories.

Table 2 Subscale means and SDs

Subscale	Japan mean (SD)	United States mean (SD)	Total mean (SD)
Empowerment	3.19 (.53)	3.72 (.64)	3.54 (.66)
Sheltering	3.24 (.55)	2.80 (.75)	2.95 (.72)
Similarity	3.86 (.56)	4.43 (.48)	4.24 (.57)
Exclusion	2.04 (.67)	1.55 (.47)	1.72 (.59)

SD, standard deviation.

manner. On the other hand, the fact that some of the differences between the U.S. and Japan were no longer significant when taking into account factors such as staff age and education suggests that attitudes may shift as newer generations enter the field. Thus, over time, Japanese staff working with individuals with ID may become increasingly open to community inclusion of people with ID. It may be possible to speed attitude change among staff by incorporating training in community living philosophy. Researchers in the U.S. found that staff receiving such training had more positive attitudes

Table 3 Multivariable model of country and covariate associations with attitudes

Variable/subscale	F	P value
Country ^a		
Empowerment	7.41	0.007
Sheltering	1.14	0.287
Similarity	7.82	0.006
Exclusion	1.27	0.261
Age ^b		
Empowerment	1.62	0.204
Sheltering	14.20	<0.001
Similarity	7.23	0.008
Exclusion	1.69	0.195
Education ^c		
Empowerment	8.46	0.004
Sheltering	12.50	0.001
Similarity	5.75	0.017
Exclusion	4.59	0.033
Client functioning level		
Empowerment	1.65	0.200
Sheltering	2.98	0.086
Similarity	1.74	0.189
Exclusion	3.18	0.076
Direct care versus supervisor		
Empowerment	0.05	0.831
Sheltering	0.67	0.415
Similarity	0.51	0.476
Exclusion	0.17	0.677
Time in field		
Empowerment	0.97	0.327
Sheltering	1.88	0.172
Similarity	0.87	0.352
Exclusion	0.15	0.697

^a Japanese staff had lower Empowerment and Similarity scores.

^b Older staff had higher Sheltering scores and lower Similarity scores.

^c More educated staff had higher Empowerment scores and lower Sheltering scores.

regarding Empowerment and Similarity of people with ID and were less likely to endorse their Exclusion and Sheltering (Henry *et al.* 1996a). Such training could be particularly impactful in Japan, where staff were less likely to endorse empowerment and similarity, even when we controlled for other variables. Training in community living philosophy may help staff better recognise and support the strengths of individuals with ID. Factoring attitudes into staff selection decisions, annual performance reviews, staff awards and promotion choices can also positively change organisational climate (cf. Henry *et al.* 2001).

This study is intended as a starting point for additional research. The participants were members of convenience samples from limited geographical areas. Because of the nature of the service systems in each country, our samples were inherently different and our analyses may not have fully accounted for these differences. Nonetheless, this study contributes to ongoing international research on attitudes towards people with ID (Ouellette-Kuntz *et al.* 2003; Henry *et al.* 2004; Yazbeck *et al.* 2004; Patka *et al.* 2013). Our study is the first to directly compare attitudes of staff in Japan and the United States. Our results provide important details about demographic and job experience variables that appear to explain the emphasis on sheltering and exclusion of people with ID among Japanese staff. These findings raise questions for future research to better understand attitudes of staff at different job levels, and may inform hiring, training and other human resource strategies to optimise delivery of services to people with ID in each country.

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