

Participating in an Infant, Child and Family Conference in Hiroshima, Japan

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We want to share our experience of being invited as keynote speakers in the “Four Winds” conference held in Hiroshima on November 2 & 3, 2013.

The “Four Winds” Association is an Infant Mental Health organization in Japan. It is multidisciplinary and has members from different parts of Japan. It was founded by Dr. Hisako Watanabe of Tokyo, after the WAIMH congress in Tampere, Finland in 1996. She and her colleagues were inspired by this event, and in the spirit of the Finnish experience, chose the four cornered multi-color Finnish hat as the symbol of their new organization. Dr. Watanabe told us that the hat itself is symbolic, because it has been used by the Finnish reindeer shepherds to detect the direction of the four winds so that they can be guided through dark and stormy weather. Thus the Japanese “Four Winds” organization feels this symbol represents the work that they do with infants, children and their families.

We were very warmly received by our Japanese colleagues. The conference took place in Hiroshima. The Four Winds Association holds conferences annually in different parts of Japan. This year it chose Hiroshima to address the topic of major trauma and its continuous impact through intergenerational transmission. The conference was very well organized. More than 400 professionals from different parts of Japan attended.

Kaspars Tuters spoke on the theme of “Dealing with the Continuity of Trauma: Intergenerational Issues.” Elizabeth Tuters presented “Challenges Working Psychodynamically with Infants/Children and their Families: Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma.”

The audience was very receptive and interesting discussions ensued. We found our Japanese colleagues to be knowledgeable and experienced. There was a great interest in work with infants.

After the conference Elizabeth was invited to Tokyo to discuss a clinical case involving infant trauma. There were about a 100 participants in the audience. It was a complex case of cumulative trauma throughout the generations. The two

Tokyo therapists presented their work clearly and in detail. The male psychiatrist worked with the parents, and the female psychologist worked with the daughter. Both met with each other and the staff to process and debrief the impact of the session material. The therapists demonstrated a capacity to understand the child and her family very deeply. The comments and questions from the audience also showed a high level of understanding child development, the child’s inner world and the internalized dynamics carried by the parents – themselves the victims of childhood abuse and neglect.

While in Tokyo, we were invited to speak about our many years of involvement

with the Global WAIMH, at the inaugural meeting of the formation of the Japan WAIMH Affiliate. It was attended by an interested group of multidisciplinary professionals, a number of them also belonging to the Four Winds Association. This group enthusiastically embraced the idea of becoming a part of the global organization that is WAIMH.

We were very impressed by our experience in Japan – the welcoming colleagues that we met, their enthusiasm and the high quality of work that they do. We look forward to welcoming soon the Japan WAIMH Affiliate into the global association.



Hisako Watanabe and Elizabeth Tuters.



From left: Elizabeth & Kas Tuters, Mitsuhaya Kurosaki (organizer of the Hiroshima conference) & Kazue Ikeda.