

Article 4

Exploring the Future of Psychological and Behavioural Science: What Works in Advancing the Field



Ms. Shirley NA, Clinical Psychologist, CSD

Introduction

From 24 to 29 March 2025, I attended the **15th Asian Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Science (ACP2025)** held in Tokyo, Japan. This global event attracted **829 delegates from 60 countries**, giving over 600 presentations on diverse psychological topics. As a clinical psychologist, I gained a deeper understanding through this conference of the emerging trends and was offered valuable networking opportunities.

The conference covered a wide range of topics, including general psychology, mental health, ageing and educational psychology. Among the highlights were **keynote speeches, panel discussions and interactive research presentations**. Of particular note was the conference's thematic focus on technology and its intersection with psychology, especially the growing role of **artificial intelligence (AI)** in shaping social behaviour, education and mental health outcomes.

Key Learnings

1. AI and Psychology: A New Frontier

Discussions surrounding AI's implications for psychology were particularly enlightening. A standout keynote, titled "*Social Robots for All Stakeholders in Elderly Care*", examined how AI-powered robots are being developed not only to assist with physical tasks but also to support the emotional and social well-being of older adults. The speaker, Mr. Hidenobu Sumioka, showcased "Hiro-chan," a robot designed to alleviate loneliness in elderly individuals with dementia. Another keynote, "*Global Citizenship Education: Human and Artificial Intelligence*", addressed the intersection of AI, education and identity development, followed by

the discussion of the challenges in fostering resilience and empathy as AI becomes more prevalent.

In addition, the panel discussion on *“Human vs Artificial Intelligence: Psychological Threats and Opportunities”* sparked deep reflection on the potential dangers posed by the rapid integration of AI into daily life. The panel focused on a range of emerging concerns, including the neurological impacts of prolonged interaction with AI-driven technologies, the risks of over-engagement with AI tools in everyday routines, and the broader socio-economic consequences such as increased unemployment due to automation. The discussion also explored the psychological and emotional toll of diminished human interaction, highlighting how increasing reliance on AI systems may contribute to social isolation, reduced empathy and shifts in collective emotional norms.

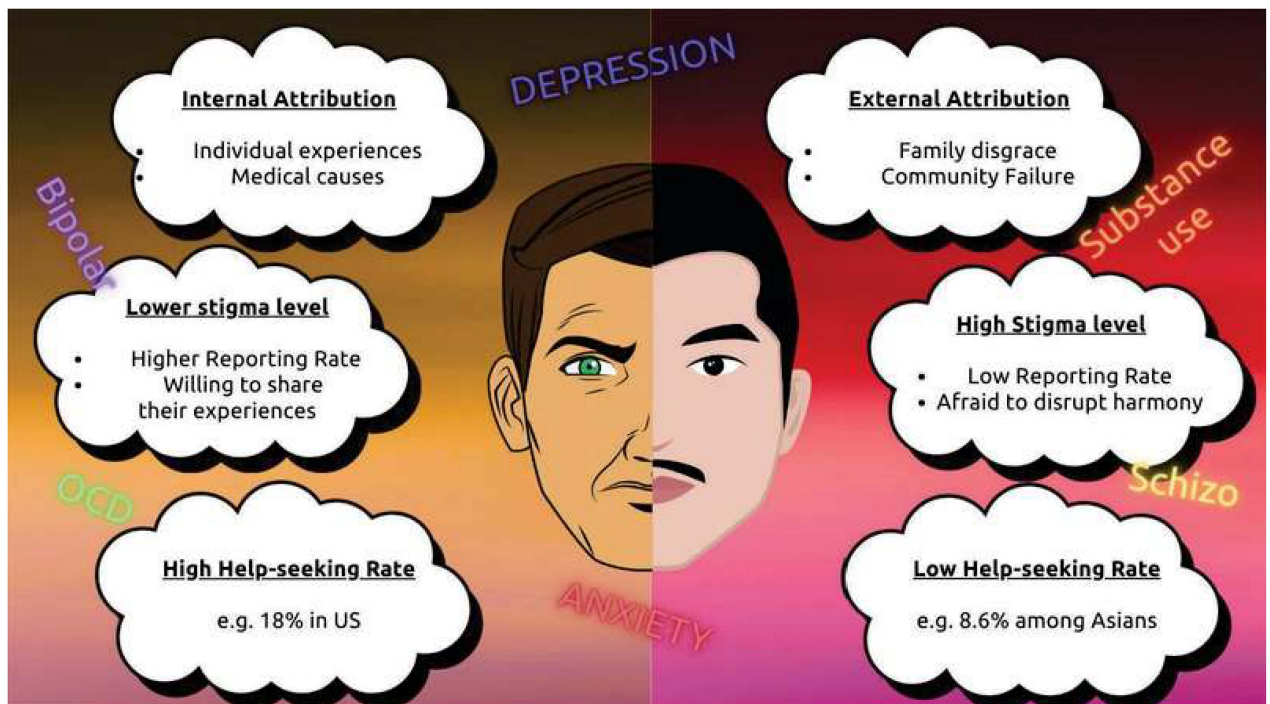
These discussions raised important questions for me, a psychologist working with incarcerated individuals: How might AI tools be responsibly leveraged to support the rehabilitation and mental well-being of persons in custody in correctional settings? Could virtual therapeutic agents be integrated into the existing services to supplement limited clinical resources while maintaining ethical and professional standards?



A brief exchange with the speaker from Japan, Mr. Hidenobu Sumioka with his AI product, “Hiro-chan”, which renders companionship to elderly with dementia in care homes

2. Cross-cultural Trends in Psychological Practice

Insights into diverse psychological practices emphasised the importance of cultural sensitivity. For instance, survivors of intimate partner violence in Asian cultures may perceive and process trauma differently from their Western counterparts. In Asian societies like the Philippines, strong familial and societal expectations can lead survivors to minimise or internalise their trauma, often delaying help-seeking or leading to feelings of shame and guilt. Presentations from countries such as Thailand and India also illustrated culturally specific approaches to mental health. For example, transgender individuals in India face multifaceted challenges shaped by cultural stigma, legal frameworks and community support systems, which require a nuanced therapeutic approach distinct from Western settings. In traditional Asian families, where the mother is typically the primary carer and the father assumes the role of breadwinner, children's attachment patterns may develop in ways that affect their self-compassion and conflict coping.



These cross-cultural perspectives reinforced the importance of **cultural competence in psychological practice**, especially in correctional settings where individuals come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Understanding these differences is critical to providing ethical, effective and person-centred rehabilitation programmes that truly meet the needs of persons in custody.

Moreover, the presentations highlighted the **universal rise in mental health awareness**, especially in post-pandemic contexts. Issues such as anxiety, depression, loneliness and trauma were common themes, emphasising the global nature of psychological distress and the shared responsibility of the international community in addressing them.

3. Networking and Collaborative Opportunities

The conference provided an invaluable opportunity to **network with international scholars and practitioners**. Engaging in conversations during poster sessions and coffee breaks allowed me to share experiences from Hong Kong's correctional system while learning about other countries' approaches to forensic psychology, prisoner rehabilitation and mental health support. These exchanges affirmed the **shared challenges** we face despite geographical differences — overcrowded facilities, limited mental health resources, and the need for innovative rehabilitation models. Engaging with professionals from Australia and Singapore, for example, opened the door to potential cross-border knowledge exchanges and future collaboration.



Networking with international experts for professional knowledge exchanges in psychological practices

4. The Importance of Evidence-based Practice

Many of the presentations emphasised the growing focus on **evidence-based and data-driven practices** in psychology. Research showcased at the conference demonstrated how empirical findings are being translated into real-world interventions — whether in schools, hospitals or institutions. This reaffirmed my commitment to grounding clinical decisions in scientific evidence. In the context of correctional services, it reinforced the importance of **evaluating the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes**, conducting regular outcome assessments, and integrating psychological research into institutional policies.



A speaker from China gives a presentation debriefing on his scientific findings on self-harm among adolescents

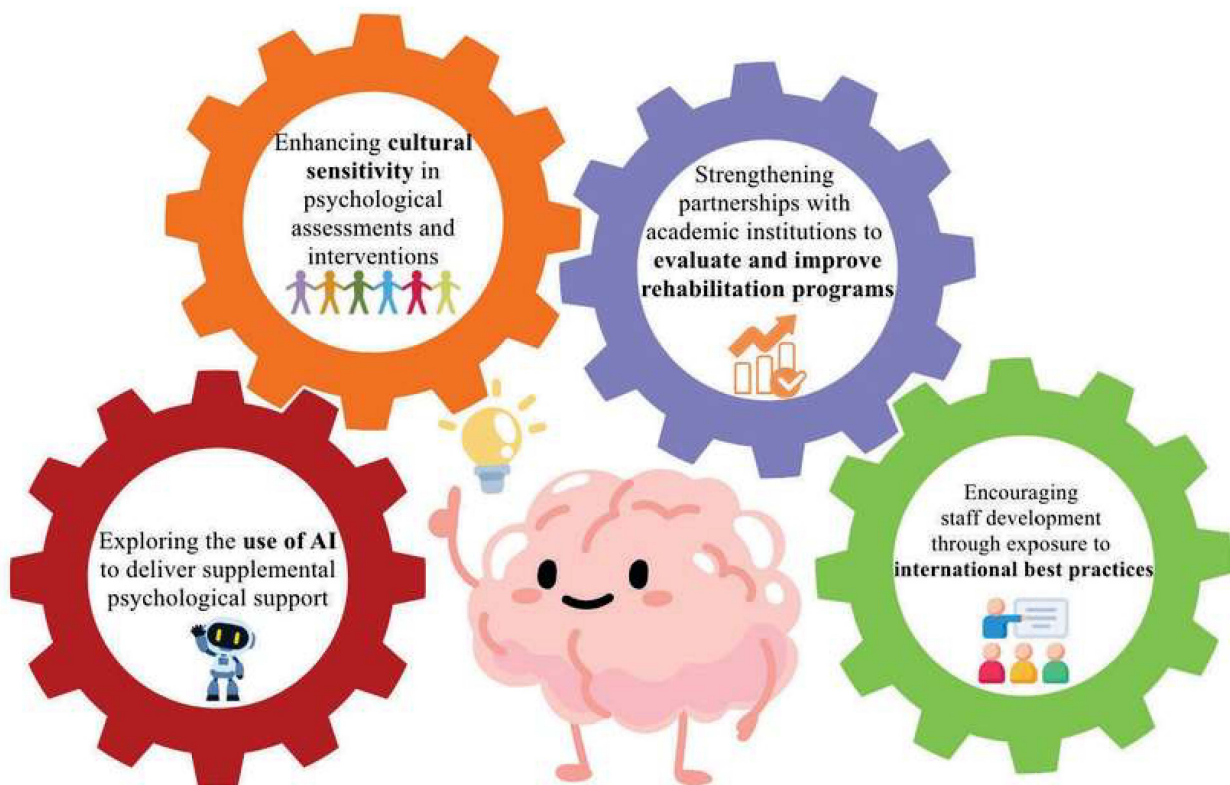
Reflections on Professional Development

Attending this conference was not only intellectually stimulating but also personally and professionally enriching. It reminded me of the **dynamic and evolving nature of psychology** — a field that increasingly intersects with technology, ethics, law and global health. I left the conference with a renewed sense of purpose and curiosity. In particular, the discussions on AI stimulated me to think beyond traditional clinical frameworks and consider how emerging

technologies might transform the way we deliver psychological services in the future. Furthermore, I gained a deeper appreciation for the **importance of international collaboration** in advancing psychological science. The diversity of voices and experiences at the conference underscored that solutions to mental health challenges must be both **locally relevant and globally informed**.

Implications for Practice in Correctional Services

Several takeaways from the conference hold direct relevance for my current work at the CSD:



Main takeaways from ACP2025. These directions aim to better support the mental health and rehabilitation of persons in custody, ultimately contributing to safer reintegration and reduced recidivism.

Conclusion

The 15th Asian Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Science was a rewarding experience that broadened my understanding of contemporary psychological issues. It underscored the significance of engaging with global trends, embracing innovation, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. Conferences like ACP2025 are essential for learning, collaboration and transformation in the field of psychology.

Insights

1. Integration of AI in Psychology

- The potential of AI to enhance therapeutic practices must be explored ethically and responsibly, especially in correctional contexts.

2. Cultural Sensitivity

- Understanding diverse cultural perspectives is crucial to effective psychological practices, particularly in rehabilitation settings.

3. Networking for Innovation

- Engaging with international professionals can lead to innovative solutions and improvements in mental health support and rehabilitation strategies.

Reference

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