



Visit to the Catholic University of Applied Sciences of North Rhine-Westphalia

— About midwifery education in Germany —

カトリック応用科学大学への訪問

— ドイツにおける助産師教育について —

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要 旨

本学の学術交流提携大学であるノルトライン ヴェストファーレン州カトリック応用科学大学（Katho）ケルン校において本年9月26～29日間に開催された同大学開学50周年の記念行事「社会の大変革（Die großen Transformationen der Gesellschaft）」に参加する機会を得た。その際に短時間であったが同校の保健医療学部助産学科の実習室を見学することが出来た。この見学を通じて、ドイツでの助産師養成の一端と同大の実習室で観察した、日本ではほとんど行われていない「お産椅子」を用いた伝統的分娩方法について報告する。

Introduction

In 2018, a university-level agreement was established between the Catholic University of Applied Sciences of North Rhine-Westphalia (Katho) in Cologne, Germany and Hiroshima Bunka Gakuen University¹⁾. Five years have passed since then. Due to the global outbreak of the new coronavirus infection, exchange activities have been suspended in recent years. However, on this occasion, we participated in an academic conference titled “The Great Transformation of Society” held at Katho in Cologne. During the conference, we had the opportunity to briefly touch upon the efforts in midwifery education at the university and gain insights into the training of midwife professionals in German.

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Midwifery Education and Training in Germany

Midwifery professionals in Germany are referred to as “Hebamme” in German²⁾, derived from the word “heben (lift)”, as explained by an interpreter. Midwifery education in Germany initially had a 2-year training period when it began in 1963. However, in 1981, it transitioned to a three-year direct entry education system after high school graduation (a system allowing midwifery education without receiving nurse education)³⁾. Admission requirements included high school graduation, but “Abitur” (German university entrance qualification) was not necessary, and students primarily received education at vocational training schools. In 2013, to standardize education criteria for specialized professions in the European Union, ensuring freedom of movement within the alliance countries (as instructed in 2005 and modified in 2013), Germany also amended the Midwife Act in 2020 to offer technical education at the bachelor’s degree level. Currently, there are 16 Midwife degree courses in Germany, allowing students to obtain a degree (Bachelor of Science) either concurrently with vocational training or after completing vocational training⁴⁾.

Katho’s Midwifery Education Programmes

The Department of Public Health (Fachbereich Gesundheitswesen), Faculty of Public Health at Katho in Cologne, which we visited, offers two programmes: the Bachelor of Science in Midwifery (Hebammenkunde, B. Sc.)⁵⁾ and the Bachelor of Science in Applied Midwifery (Hebammenwissenschaft / Midwifery, B. Sc.)⁶⁾. The former offers the opportunity to gain an academic qualification (B. Sc.) for those already qualified; it opened in 2013 and is scheduled for 30 September 2025. The latter offers the Applied Midwifery Science/Midwifery: B. Sc. by the Bachelor of Midwifery training programme under the current Midwifery Act. This degree programme offers extensive practical training on campus and in affiliated practise centres and clinics and allows students to sit for the national examination for professional licensure. The programme opened in 2021 and currently enrolls students up to the second year, with a new third year starting this autumn; the number of students per academic year is around 40.

We were shown new delivery beds for practical exercises that will be used in this autumn’s exercises and educational equipment for future exercises. Most of the equipment used in midwife education was similar to what we observed in Japan, but we noticed the inclusion of “birthing chair”. While we had some knowledge of this equipment from a book called “Journey to the Birthing Chair” written by historical anthropologist Dr. Mayuho Hasegawa⁷⁾, we were deeply impressed to observe that it was actually being used as a tool in midwife education. In Japan, the equipment is rarely recognised as a method of delivery work, and there is no explanation of its use in midwife education textbooks, making it a topic of great interest.

According to Hasegawa, the birthing chair was used for childbirth from the Renaissance to the 19th century in Western Europe, including France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Germany. It is thought that the reason it was not used in Japan is that it was not originally a lifestyle in which people sat on chairs, and that by the time western medicine was introduced to Japan in the Meiji period, modern medicine was already being promoted in Europe, and the birthing chair was falling into disuse. Hence, it was never introduced to Japan. Therefore, it is hardly recognised as a method of delivery in Japan today and is confined to a few obstetrics departments (*e.g.* Japanese Red Cross Tokyo Katsushika Perinatal Centre, Tokyo) and midwifery centres that conduct free-style births⁸⁾.

Photos 1 and 2 illustrate how the birthing chair is used in practice at Katho in Cologne. As shown in the pictures, the woman holds onto a long cloth hanging above and gives birth while sitting on the

birthing chair. The midwife is seated beside the woman and assists her during delivery. Teacher Professor Dr. Dorothee said that midwifery in this position is a good method because it allows the midwife to see and be close to the birth mother and she can relax. She also stated that this method of delivery using a birthing chair is common in Germany for normal deliveries. Although we could not observe it this time, we were told that underwater births were also performed. When we told them that it was very interesting to practise a certain “traditional” method of using a birthing chair, they told us that the teachers had originally worked at the same hospital and had practised this type of birth. Together, they told us that they had transferred to this midwifery course as teachers. It could be inferred that having teachers working in the same direction and providing midwifery education would be very beneficial for the students.

Conclusion

The training was very useful, together with the learning at the conference, as we were unexpectedly able to exchange information on midwifery education in Germany and to come into contact with the actual “birthing chair”. In Germany, it is a legal requirement⁹⁾ that a midwife accompanies every birth. Perhaps for this reason, the attitude of the faculty members involved in the education of the midwifery course at Katho showed their enthusiasm for the profession and for education as midwives. We felt the same enthusiasm as midwives in Japan and realised that this is something we have in common as those involved in the universal work of midwifery. If the opportunity arises, we want to revisit the Katho in Germany to obtain information on specific midwifery education. We would also like to continue to exchange information on nursing and welfare through our cooperation with the university and seek to link this to better undergraduate education.

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Photo 1. A part of delivery practice room and birthing chair (left).
Photo 2. Explanation of birth of the baby using the chair (right).