

Social Attitudes toward Indonesian Care Workers: News Reporting on EPA and Examinations in Japan

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1. Aim

Drawing on analyses of Japanese news reports on “the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Indonesia” and “health care workers,” this paper examines how national context affected by globalization shapes social attitudes toward a new social issue – care workers from abroad – and policy in Japan over time. Japan, known to have very few immigrants, has started receiving professional health care workers as “EPA care worker candidates” from Indonesia since 2008. The candidates are required to acquire the Japanese language and pass the national examinations within a particular period to continue working in Japan. This project pays particular attention to the social issue construction and policy institutionalization processes around EPA care worker candidates from Indonesia and national examinations in Japan.

2. Data & Methods

To address these research questions, I counted and charted national news reporting on EPA, care workers, Indonesia (and other nations), and related issues since 2000. For qualitative content analyses, I drew on a sample of 242 national newspaper articles from the top two most subscribed papers ($N_1=135$, $N_2=107$) in Japan between 2006 – 2013 that included the words “Economic Partnership Agreement,” “Indonesia,” “nursing/nurse,” “care work/worker,” and “examination” in the heading or contents. While this limits to two news outlets over these few years, the sample allows us to examine how the Japanese elite media have constructed the issue for the first time.

3. Results

Analyses show that the news reporting on EPA hit the first peak in 2007 a year before the agreement started with Indonesia. Yet, the number of articles on Indonesian care workers and examinations began increasing dramatically after the agreement started with Indonesia in 2008. Qualitative analyses tell that the coverage on national examinations and other language/cultural adaptation concerns for EPA care worker candidates grew dramatically after the program. Occasionally, reports include stories on immigrant care workers to North American and European countries as references.

4. Conclusion

To sum, social attitudes, represented in the national news reporting, toward health care workers from Indonesia began growing as reactions to the actual challenges experienced by Indonesian and Japanese workers in hospitals and care homes. The contribution of this study is to find out how a national context, affected by local problems (rapid aging, care worker shortages) and globalization, constructs social attitudes toward a new social issue and policy in Japan.