



## Research Seminar: Accommodating the Needs of Persons with Disabilities in Policies concerning Public Health Emergencies: Law, Ethics and Practice

**Abstract:** Persons with disabilities suffer disproportionately in all types of public emergencies and public health emergencies are no exception. Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has halted transport, logistics circulation, business and public services, all of which has contributed directly or indirectly to paralysing essential medical, rehabilitative and other support services, leaving many persons with disabilities in desperate situations. The burden of caregiving in homes also increased drastically leading many.

The aim of the project is to develop an empirically informed and theoretically supported policy framework for the Hong Kong government to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities in public health emergencies. The study is divided into three phases and adopts a mixed method of qualitative research and policy analysis. In Phase 1, focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 74 participants, including 57 persons with disabilities, seven carers (of persons with disabilities) and ten representatives from civil society and service providers, in order to understand their experience during COVID-19 and their vulnerabilities and needs in public health emergencies. In Phase 2, a roundtable expert discussion was held to examine the relationship between different Asian governments' attitudes towards persons with disabilities and how effectively their needs are accommodated in public health emergency management – including, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore – as past epidemics have highlighted how closely Asian jurisdictions are intertwined in terms of physical proximity, social ties and transport links and thus their mutual susceptibility to infectious diseases. Eight experts and representatives of the Disability Office of Singapore's Ministry of Social and Family Development took part. Whereas the purpose of Phase 1 was to collect data in relation to the challenges persons with disabilities faced, Phase 2 examined whether (and how) different policy approaches provide better protections for persons with disabilities and if so why. In Phase 3 of the project, we examined the legal and ethical implications for governments to protect persons with disabilities in public health emergencies. Five experts from Hong Kong, Canada and the US were engaged in the discussion.

**Results showed:** 1) socio-economic factors (such as age, gender, degree of isolation, computer literacy) increase the social vulnerability of persons with disabilities in a public health emergencies across disability categories; 2) jurisdictions with robust policies and sound legal framework at times of normalcy are more capable of protecting persons with disabilities at times of public health emergencies; 3) both international law and ethics require governments to devise inclusive plans and policy to protect the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all stages of emergency management; and 4) how these legal and moral obligations may be better understood in light of three normative moral duties on the part of governments, namely: the duty to protect; the duty to plan and the duty to lead.



**Dr. Stephenson Chow** researches public international law and international human rights law, with a specific focus on diversity and inclusion. His work covers a wide range of topics including the rights of persons with disabilities, discrimination, cultural rights, multiculturalism and ethnic conflicts. He has published widely in leading journals, and has been many cited by governments and human rights bodies including the European Parliament and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (UK). In 2017, he was awarded the International & Comparative Law Quarterly's Young Scholar Prize.

**Date :** 24th May 2022 (Tuesday)  
**Time :** 14:00 GMT+8 (Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Singapore)  
(15:00 GMT+9 Japan, South Korea)  
(13:00 GMT +7 Thailand)

**Language :** English

**This seminar will be conducted online via Zoom, please click the link below or scan the QR code for registration.**

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**Dr Becky Leung's** research interests focus primarily on the courtroom experiences and stigma of individuals with psychosocial disabilities. Her work have been published in international academic journals. In 2019, Dr Leung was awarded as a Fulbright Scholar. After returning to Hong Kong, she devoted herself to teaching and research.